

Young Guns

by Spirit o' Fire

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Summary: Spartan IIIs are supposed to be the next hope for the prevail of humanity. But, when these adolescent soldiers are forced to greet the horrors of war face to face, how will they deal with the issues that haunt even the hardest of Soldiers?

1. Battle of the SSFE

CPU Domain: Public. Programâ€|? HaxHaxHax.exe Reroutingâ€| Entering Sect.Zer: Enter A-Code: 117343â€|Access Approved.

****UNSC/ONI Biographical Records****

CLASSIFIED****

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â€|Accessing. File 01/425 of ****PROJECT: CHRYSANTHEMUM****: Delta Company

Spartan-III D001 - Flynn Harne Biographical Information

****Birth date****: February 28 2537

****Species****: Human; Male

****Homeworld****: Earth

****Date upon Conscription****: August 4 2547. Conscripted under special circumstances; Colonel James Ackerson scouted Lt. Commander Harne while planning PROJECT: CHRYSANTHEMUM: Delta Company on Earth.

****Date of Augmentation****: August 12 2547

****Results of Augmentation****: 100 success; First active upon completion of recovery processes.

****Training****: Exceeded all expectations; deemed Leader of Fire Team Frito by SCPO Franklin Mendez. Note: Was the leading hand-to-hand Combatant in Delta Company. As a result, got into several fights while training on Onyx, despite his great fondness of the rest of his comrades in Delta Company. Also, broke SCPO Mendez' arm during final combat examination.

****First Combat Deployment****: Battle of the Scandinavian Space Freight Elevator, October 21, 2552. Battle Transcript follows.

****140****: A Single Covenant Assault Carrier finds a hole in UNSC Defensive Cluster Kilo.

****156****: Scouts from the CAC see that the Scandinavian Space Freight Elevator was delivering ammunition to DC Kilo.

****200****: CAC dispatches excessive amounts of Orbital Insertion Pods to the base of the SSFE with several payloads of Anti-Matter for disabling the SSFE.

****214****: The Spartan-IIIs of Delta Company at Camp Allen in Sundsvall, Sweden are brought to Combat Alert Alpha and ordered to protect the SSFE at all costs.

****220****: Delta Company arrives near the base of the SSFE. They are greeted by Covenant resistance.

****235****: Fire Team Frito, led by D001, is the first team to reach the SSFE. Frito receives information that all other teams of Delta Company are pinned down at various points around the SSFE. Frito provides covering fire for incoming Spartan-IIIs.

****237****: Covenant Forces withdraw for unknown reasons. All remaining members of Delta Company arrive at the base of the SSFE.

****238****: Engineers of Delta Company begin attempts to deactivate the Anti-Matter charges at the base of the SSFE.

****239****: The Elites make a full-frontal assault on remaining Spartan-IIIs.

****246****: After several minutes of defense, more of the Spartan-IIIs in the area have been eliminated. The Anti-Matter Charges were successfully deactivated.

****247****: Covenant forces overrun the remaining defense at the SSFE, and the remaining Spartan-IIIs fall back into the base beneath the Elevator. D001 orders the remaining Spartans to activate their S.P.I. Armor, separate, and attempt to get back to the surface.

****250****: D001 and the other members of Delta Company meet up on the surface. There is an estimated 300 Elites still in the SSFE Subterranean Base.

****251****: ONI Prowler Point of no Return arrives at the base of the SSFE for relief of the remaining Spartan-IIIs.

****252****: D049 programs the SSFE to rise up to a height of 5000 feet and then enter freefall. D049 also locks the doors, keeping the remaining Covenant forces locked in the subterranean base. The Spartan-IIIs leave the SSFE in the ONI Prowler.

****255****: The platform of the SSFE impacts the Titanium/Chromium Base, causing a shockwave that combusts the heads of all Covenant forces still inside the subterranean base.

****Result****: UNSC victory, at the cost of 1/2 of Delta Company.

****Manuscript of the Battle****

Ship Master 'Notodee looked impatiently around the bridge of the _Peacemaker_. Engineers, Grunts, and Elites ran every which way, telling of what the humans were doing and what we should have been doing.

"Sir, shields at 48 percent!"

"Plasma Turrets 30 through 46 are offline!"

"Aft Engines are overheating!"

'Notodee tried to clear his head. All he could hear was the yelling of every soldier on deck. Regret's carrier had punched through the Human Defensive Grid hours ago, and they were being obliterated without a good sense of leadership.

"Sir! The _Recurring Fury_ just punched a hole in the Human Defensive Grid!"

At this, 'Notodee perked up. He clicked his mandibles in subtle delight.

"All right! We are going to fly through that hole and take this fight to the surface!" 'Notodee said in his commanding voice.

The ship's pilots maneuvered around the Human Gun Platforms and towards the gap. The _Peacemaker_'s automated Point-Defense lasers cut through the hulls of incoming Human vessels. 'Notodee watched as the planet on the view screen grew larger and larger. Then, an obscurity caught his eye. A large steel rafter, connected to a meteor was making a loud _oomph-oomph-oomph_ noise he could feel in his boots. Human ships, mostly frigates, were docking with the rafter just below the meteor. Then he realized: It was delivering ammunition to the ships. He knew that he had to cut off the Human vessels' refueling method. He turned to the video panel on his Captain's chair.

"Sir!" he addressed Admiral 'Xytanoree. "Permission to land on the planet and cut off the Human's ammunition delivery system."

'Xytanoree thought for a moment. "Permission denied, Ship Master. We need all the defense we can get in Space. You can, however, send in a ground team to disable it planet side."

"Thank you Admiral." 'Notodee said.

His comm chirped. "Ship Master?" a voice crackled through.

"Yes commander?" 'Notodee answered.

"What are your orders?"

"Order all Elites not needed on board to get to an Orbital Insertion Pod. We are taking this fight to the surface." 'Notodee said.

"Yes Ship Master." Said the commander.

The comm crackled back out. He clicked his mandibles once again, and sat back in his chair as he watched a thousand black pods rocket to the planet's surface.

Spartan D001 Flynn sat in his temporary room at Camp Allen in Sundsvall, Sweden. He was reading the day's battle reports on his HoloPad. Even with the heat cranked and in winter attire, he was still cold; enough so to see his breath.

"Damn cold." He said as he shivered. "I'd rather be back on Onyx. Or at least fighting those uglies up in space."

"I hear that." said D057 - Mike. "While we're down here, freezing our balls off, our 'elders' upstairs are having all the fun. Man, what I wouldn't give to see one of those bastards up close and-" he put his hands like he was holding an Assault Rifle, "BANG! Right between the eyes!" he said. Even though neither of us were even 18, even some Spartan-IIs were surprised at our eagerness to fight.

Poor Mike had lost both his parents during the siege of Jericho VIII, and was itching to fight. He was 17, contrary to my 15, and had been one of my closest friends during the training process. His long, brown hair came down to the bottom of his ears, and his blue eyes darted around the page of his magazine. He had Military in his family: every male in his family back 13 generations had been in the military. He even taught me some things his father learned as a Marine: shield weak spots, what to do to make a Grunt cry, and even Sangheili genitalia. One shot there, and they would "squeal like a piggahy!" as Mike said.

I, myself, didn't know my father all too well. We were living on Earth, and he supposedly went off to join the Marines. He was in the papers getting awards, and then he was just gone. No obituary, no nothing. It was like he had disappeared. Mom, on the other hand, worked for Military Intelligence, and was rarely home. She was around, but maybe once a week. When I was called by Ackerson, I didn't want to tell my Mom that I was going to go into the Spartan-III Program. Instead, I told her that I was going into the UNSC Spec Ops Corps, and was gonna be away a while. She bought it, but I felt horrible lying to my Mother.

My train of thought was broken by a Klaxon.

"Th' hell?" Mike said.

"Oh, great." I said. I, too, was anxious to fight, but when I realized what we were being urgently called for, I got a rotten feeling in the pit of my gut.

I heard Ackerson over the speaker. "All Spartan-IIIs come to the briefing room. Now!"

Mike started to say "Ahh, what ev-"

"That means you too, Mike." He said sternly.

"Dammit." Mike grumbled. He threw down his magazine and put a shirt on.

I decided that if Mike actually did go to the meeting, it had to be of at least some importance. I threw down my HoloPad and left. In the hallway, I caught up with D049 - Lindsay in the hallways.

"Hey, babe!" I said, jokingly. Ever since the first exercises we participated in, and she called me "Sugar", I returned the favor in my own way, just to get her goat.

"So, what do you reckon this is all about?" She said in her Southern accent.

"I dunno, but it can't be good." I answered as I stepped into the conference room.

Travel to the Scandinavian Space Freight Elevator, eliminate all Covenant forces in the area, which were all Elites, deprogram four Anti-Matter charges, haul each of the half-ton bombs onto a Bus-sized Prowler, and then get out of there all under one hour.

That was our mission. Unfortunately, the survival rate for this mission, even though they didn't tell us what it was, was extremely low. 300 shieldless adolescent humans against 1000 battle-hardened Elites with weapons the surpassed our own by light-years gave us odds like finding a needle in a haystack, the needle being survivors and the haystack being dead Spartans.

I went back to the room and began to get dressed. First, my form-fitting Body Glove. The armor had to completely cover the glove, or else the stealth wouldn't work. Leg armor first. I strapped on the thigh plates and shin plates, and then added the boots, which looked like rounded-off bricks. Mike helped me out with my upper paneling: Chest, shoulders, and back. I helped him also, and then found my helmet. The odd, egg shaped helmet met a bubble dome that provided the visor.

Mike slapped together his MA5K and strapped seven extra clips into panels concealed in the armor. He had gotten some DU; depleted uranium, rounds from an "unknown contributor", he lies. He gave me a couple clips, but kept the other eight for himself. They pack a bigger punch, so to speak. Instead of taking ten shots to deplete a shield, it took three, and they made what ever was behind the shield reel back in amazement.

He thought that the DU rounds plus semiautomatic fire made for

serious killing. I opted for the single shot setting for my MA5K. Since it could fire as fast as you could pull the trigger, I thought that it was more controllable and accurate than auto-fire.

We piled into the Prowler Transport and their Squad Pods by team. I looked around. My squad was full of familiar faces, friends and ex-enemies. D017 â€" Carlo, the joker of the team; D093 â€" Sarah, a girl who could lift more weight than any guy in our squad; D299 â€" Matt, the resident Rocker with a thing for old stuff: Metallica, AC/DC, Rush, etc; D118 â€" Christine, the sniper and conscious of the group; and Mike. Our Fire Team, Frito, was supposedly the best in Delta Company. We were about to meet the enemy by method of Aerial Shock Drop, followed by hard contact and heavy resistance. This was our time.

We flew through the air with the other two ships behind us. The six of us were separated from all 294 of the rest of our brothers and sisters, and yet, we still felt as if we were right there with them.

"30 seconds to drop, kids, and y'all have fun down there, ya hear?"

_Heh. Friggin Pilots. _

We looked around, just to make sure we all were still there, and put on our helmets. I could faintly hear Matt's music over the comm.

"Sound off!" I yelled into my comm.

After I heard five shouts, I thought I oughtta comfort the skittish ones among us. "You all ready? Make sure you've got a bead on 'em before you shoot, and watch the crossfire. Now, if you need me, just yell and I'll be on that Covie Ugly like stink on crap."

"Thanks, Flynn." I heard a few times.

From up front, "All right kids. Here! We! Go!"

I smiled. "You ready to rock, Matt?"

"Hahaha! Like a Hurricane, baby!"

"Yeah, you two'll be gabbin' while I'm doin' all the Killin'!" Sarah retaliated.

"Mark!"

We dropped. It was an instant of weightless bliss I felt, and then I heard the whooping of Carlo. Crazy Bastard.

The HUD in my helmet told me that the Titanium on our hull was staying intact at 73. As long as it stayed above 65, we would probably survive the fall.

Probably.

WHAM!!! Our Squad Pod hit the ground like a ton of bricks, and I could feel the impact in my teeth.

"Earn this armor, folks!" I heard Mike yell. One by one, the teenagers next to me disappeared. You couldn't even see the outlines of the user that Active Camo left; they were GONE, like they weren't even there. The door on our Squad Pod flew off, and I heard a yelp of pain. It wasn't Human, and I knew that we had flattened one of those Split-Lips with the door. Man, if they all were that easyâ€¦|..

We hopped out of the Squad Pod and crept stealthily towards the next large hill, covered in snow. The fact that it was dark didn't make things any better; I told the squad to switch to night vision. I unlimbered my MA5K and motioned my squad to do the same. There weren't any Aliens on the Motion detector, so I moved the squad up over the hill. Luckily for us, the entire base of the SSFE was in a sort of bowl, providing a lip that we could sit on and pick them off. I switched to my in-helmet Binoculars and examined the battlefield.

There were hundreds of Elites down there, and Elites alone, too. Planting explosive, monitoring the area, setting up lights, talking in their alien tongue and more. I told our team to wait on top of the lip and wait for the other teams to get into position. Christine, as if she was reading my mind, got out her sniper rifle and got ready. I waited.

"Fire Team Zealous in Position."

"Fire Team Douglas, ready to go."

"Fire Team Ryan, Ready."

I heard all other teams call in, and wait for my command. I waited for a minute, just to see what happened. I saw one Elite motion to something dangerously close to our position.

"Hey Christine, you see that Bug looking at us?"

"Yeah."

"All other teams, wait until you see members of Frito fire, than fire at will."

"What about the Elite?" Carlo asked.

I laughed. "Make him bleed."

What was an Elite an instant ago was now a pair of legs.

Every Elite in the bowl had turned towards our position. And raised their guns.

"Oh, snap, we're in it now!" yelled Sarah.

White streaks flew from all around the bowl and impacted right into Elite. The other members of Delta Company began firing right into the mass of Covenant soldiers. We didn't even have to aim. They fell by the hundreds, and they were in utter chaos. I could see it now.

"Blarg Blarg Blarg! Honk Honk Bla-errghh!" Brought a smile to my

face.

I saw that they had finally smartened up and were moving to cover. They would dive into a metal tent and wait it out. I started yelling "Cease Fire! Cease Fire!". There were naturally a few shots of overkill, due to the cruel nature of some of the soldiers in our company.

The ground was blanketed in dead Elite; at least half of their original numbers. I wasn't sure if there were any wounded, or even how many were still left alive.

"Christine, stay here. I'll radio if we need any backup. Just to be sure." I said.

"Okay. No prob." She was very understanding; more than most of the group. Also, she didn't have the violent tendencies that others did.

"Reload, and follow me." I heard guns click and click again. We walked towards the Covenant camp, making careful not to touch anything that could make noise. The only noise that we could hear was the crunch of snow beneath our feet, the occasional moaning Elite, which was usually followed by the POP of an MA5K.

The snow was dyed a deep purple, and it smelled disgusting. Alien Guts. Ewww.

"Detecting Motion. Rifles up!" Carlo said, in a hushed voice.

We turned in all directions and looked for anything to shoot. We all stood back to back, and slowly rotated, so we could cover all directions.

Two Elites came out of hiding and roared right at us. _Stupid_, I thought, _We shouldn't have left the camouflage off._

We fired at them. They fired at us. I squeezed the trigger so fast it was like it was on Semi-Auto. The Elites reeled back, still firing their Plasma Rifles at us. Once one had fallen due to a headshot by Matt, Mike ran up at the other who was still standing, pulled out his Combat Knife, and jammed it right into the Elite's chest. The Elite let out a long moan, and then just looked at Mike like he was even more pissed than before. It threw Mike off his feet, and took out a Plasma Grenade.

"Aw, crap!" I yelled. "Duck for cover!" Everyone jumped out of the way, and we saw a peculiar sight: the Elite activated the grenade, stuck itself on the arm, and then began to run towards us. No one was in position to shoot the Elite, now that we had dived out of the way. But, I had a guardian angel; we all did. No sooner did the Elite take one step then did he lose his arm to Christine. She shot it off at the shoulder, and it ended up flying twenty feet back before detonating.

"Jeez, fellas, I didn't know you needed me that bad!" I heard Christine say.

"Woman, I'm buying you a steak after this!" Mike yelled.

The poor Elite had been stabbed, pumped full of lead, lost an arm, and was still alive. It fell over, just staring at the rest of us, speaking in its native tongue. It was pretty pitiful.

We walked over to it, since it obviously wasn't a threat to us anymore, and looked. Matt and Sarah were taking care of Mike, and Carlo came with me to look at the Elite.

"Dang it, man, just end it already." I said. Even though this thing had probably killed several people, several Humans, I still felt sorry for it.

I turned away, and heard the POP of the MA5K. It made me jump. Then, it felt as if I was outside my body looking in. Why was I feeling sorry for this thing? It had probably killed lots of Marines just because his false Gods told him, and had no real clue why he was killing in the first place. Slaughter just for the sake of it. Yeah, he deserved it.

We finally got to the base of the FFSE, near the doors that led underground for the personnel. Unfortunately, we got there too late. All the workers had been slaughtered by the Elites.

Just then, we got a radio. The night had suddenly been lit up with Blue light and White bursts. "Listen, man, everything down here is FUBAR! We need covering fire!"

"Sit tight, man, here it comes!" I turned to my squad. "Covering Fire! Make sure those troops get here!" We opened up. The DU rounds Mike gave me had been a life saver; they helped to take down those Elites we met a minute ago. We fired towards the crowds of soldiers, both Elite and Human. We saw several Elites go down, but also several Spartans. I could hear the screams of teenage boys and girls echoing through my Comm, and just got even madder. "Didn't I say to make sure those kids survive?!?! Kill those friggin' Squids, Dammit!" Our squad just fired faster. Several sniper shots rang out, and we saw several more Elites fall, but not enough to prevent any more Spartan casualties.

After a minute or two more of prolonged firing, the remaining Spartans reached the base of the SSFE. I talked to the survivors, and found our losses. 59 had died, and we had 207 Spartans at the SSFE Subterranean Base entrance; the rest were sniping on the ridge.

I was also getting reports from some team leaders that the Elites had just turn and run. They made their way towards the lip of the bowl and then visuals were lost.

Our engineers had started to deactivate the Anti-Matter Bombs. Lucky for us, They hadn't set a timer on the explosives yet, and they were waiting for someone to come along and make them explode. First, they shut down the bombs. Then, they cut off all those pesky spikes that kept them in place. It was going smoothly: the Elites were gone, we got the Bombs, and had minimal casualties. Then I realized: It was too easy. I instantly got a bad feeling in my gut.

I walked over to Sarah. "Man, Sarah, I got a bad feeling about this."

"What do you mean?" she queried.

"Elites never turn tail and run unless they're coming back even badder." I paused. "Gimme the Comms booster. I'm calling in our Snipers." I waited until the large dark green box had the same frequency as my radio, and I spoke. "Alright Party People! Helluva good start! Unfortunately, the Split-Lips are planning something big. Get on back here."

We couldn't wing it with those things coming back. We needed a plan.

"Hey! Flynn." I heard behind me.

I turned around. It was a short, blonde-haired boy, and he couldn't have been more than 12. He was too young to be fighting, in my opinion. "Hey man, I got a plan to kill those baddies. You wanna hear it?"

I stood for a moment. "Tcch. Yeah man, I'm open for suggestions."

"Allright, so here's the plan: Were gonna defend this platform at all costs. I think they've got 450 to 500 soldiers left still alive, so we're gonna have to go all out. The odds are a measly two to one, odds I know we can handle."

"Hey, dipstick, what happens if we get overrun?" I heard from the crowd.

"Well, uh," I looked around, "We're gonna lure them into the Subterranean base, and try to lock 'em up. Now, get to defensive positions."

I saw a good 200 soldiers fan out and get into a ring shaped position around the SSFE. They all looked nervous, but I had a feeling that this mission was going to end well.

Finally, the Snipers began coming back in. I saw lots of them walk up, get ready for battle, but I didn't see Christine. I worried. I guess that was my shortcoming: caring too much. I always made sure all of my squad mates were okay before doing something big, like this. I fired up my Comms.

"Hey Christine! Where you at?" Static. "Christine!" More static.

Then, I started to hear something. "Flyâ€¦.ovenant on ridâ€¦..eed helpâ€¦..nyone!"

I flipped again to my Binocular setting in my helmet. I could see her fighting back five Covie troops with a sniper in one hand and a Magnum in the other.

"Get Ready! Here they come!" I heard from a few feet away.

"Sniper! Someone gimme a Sniper!" I yelled. An armor-clad teen with a rifle as tall as he was came over next to me. "You see that Spartan on the ridge?" He nodded. "Get rid of those things chasing her."

I heard three shots ring out and saw four Elites fall. Christine no-scoped the fifth, and as soon as she saw that they all were dead, she began sprinting towards the base of the SSFE.

But she wasn't alone. Just as she broke into a sprint, a bunch of Elites came over the ridge, at least twenty, and they all were gunning for her. The good thing about those Plasma Rifles was that they were pretty inaccurate, unless you were closer than thirty feet.

I thought she was gonna make it. She was more than halfway to us. But then, one lucky Elite scored a hit on her, burning a hole in the back of her helmet and burning straight through.

"No!" I gasped. It was all I could manage. I had never seen a human die, and with what I just saw, I never wanted to see it again.

Mike saw that I had frozen. "Flynn whatâ€|?" He looked towards where I was. "Oh, shit!"

I didn't know what to do, and the others in our company had started firing at the incoming Elites. Their firing and cursing just made it harder to concentrate. I didn't know what else to do. I had to help her. So I ran. I ran for both of our lives.

"Flynn! No! She's already dead!" I heard Mike yell. I didn't care. I needed some solace. I needed to make sure she wasn't going to be forgotten.

When I reached her body, I could almost smell the Elites breath they were so close. Most of the ones who were chasing her originally had disengaged to fight the bulk of our forces at the base of the SSFE. There were three nearing her body. I made a quick look at Christine. She had been shot right in the back of her head, and had a serious burn that looked like it even hit bone. It didn't look like she was moving at all. The three Elites got within fifteen feet of me. I wasn't sure if one of them was the one who got Christine, but every part of my body wanted me to get up and get some killing done. I switched my MA5K to Semi-Auto and fired at the beasts. They returned fire. I downed one of them before it could get more than three shots off. The other two must have known I meant business, and they moved to cover, but I filled one of 'em with lead before he reached cover. The other got to cover right as I pointed the gun at him. I fired a few shots, hoping to hit him, but my gun just clicked and ran out of ammo. I threw it down and unhooked a grenade. Our grenades had to be specially made, in order to not compromise our stealth, blah, blah, blah. They were basically dark green orbs that hooked into our thigh and shin pads. I primed the frag and tossed right behind where the Elite was standing. He dived out of cover and landed five feet from me. The grenade drowned out the sound of me coming up behind him and he probably thought I had retreated. I could imagine his surprise when I turned him around and punched him right in the face. He stepped back a few paces and grabbed his face, probably because I broke something. He clenched his hands into fists and tackled me. He got me around the waist and brought me down into the snow-covered

ground. It felt like getting hit by a train. He raised his fist into the air and brought it down with the intention of breaking my helmet in. I rolled out of the way as his fist hit the ground. I planted a good kick right where his kidney should've been if he was Human, and he slid over a few feet. I got up and saw blue flecks of light being emitted from his armor, and I knew that his shields were down. I ran at the Elite as he was sitting back up and slammed into him at thirty miles per hour. When I made contact, we slid about five feet back into one of those metal tents they had set up. The Elites head slammed against the wall and he turned his head back towards me, angry as ever. So I hit him. And I hit him again. Over and over, in the face. The gauntlets for S.P.I. armor were like bricks, so it must have hurt him pretty bad. I was kneeling on his hands, and he couldn't dislodge them. At first, He grunted loudly. The grunts grew gradually softer, and I could see the life draining from his eyes. Whenever I pulled my fist back to punch him again, it would come back a little more purple than the time it went in. I stopped after about ten more seconds, and got up off his body. It lay there against the wall, head caved in; motionless. I looked down at my gloves, and they were almost completely purple with the blood of that Elite. I heard footsteps. I turned towards the door, breathing heavily. I readied myself to jump at whatever was coming through the door. Then, I saw a familiar helmet look in. It was Mike.

"God dang, Flynn what did you d-" he started, but then saw the dead Elite. "Oh." He finished. "You were stupid to come out here alone."

"I know, but I didn't really know what I was doing. I justâ€¦" I motioned to the three dead Elites.

"What ever. Come on; help me with Christine's body. Things are getting bad up at the SSFE." Mike reminded me. We gingerly picked up Christine and carried her back to our own.

In the five minutes I had gone, everything had fallen to pieces. We lost several Spartan-IIIs, but the Elites lost several ranks of their own, too. They had the brains to get rid of our snipers first, so that they could fight in closer proximity where their weapons were more accurate.

As soon as I got there, I loaded my last DU clip into my MA5K and set it back to single shot. I started at firing at the Elites. It took about five shots to take one down; three if you had exceptional aim. Around me, teenagers were firing wildly into the night, hitting whatever they could manage. I could see four more Spartan-IIIs fall in close proximity to me, and I made the decision to move into the base.

"Everyone! Into the Base, now! Rendezvous at Grid Point Alpha once we're all inside!" Almost all at once, all the troops stopped firing and moved towards the doors that led inside. "Everyone not inside the base, throw a grenade to keep 'em out here!"

People started unhooking their grenades, sometimes more than one at a time, and just threw them into the crowds of Aliens that were on our doorstep. The 'nades would lower their shields, and would force them to wait outside for a few minutes. I picked up Christine and made my

way towards the base doors, and saw another thing that broke my heart: the twelve year old that had come to me with the plan lay on his back, with several holes in his armor, and one right in his visor. His blank stare chilled me to the bone. We piled into the Subterranean base, and shut the doors behind us, praying that no human was still out there.

Once we all were present and accounted for, I walked over to the Company's medic, who was looking at Christine.

"Well, she ain't dead." He told me. "She's just pretty banged up. That Plasma bolt that hit her hit the top of her spinal cord, and she lost all motor functions. She got hit and just blacked out. A day or two in the stasis pod will fix her up right."

What a relief, I thought.

I turned to the group of Spartan-IIIs in front of me. "All right, guys, here's what we're gonna do: Once those dumb Bugs get in here, everyone turn on your S.P.I. Armor. We'll split up into teams no larger than three, and rendezvous back on top."

As soon as I finished my sentence, a loud banging could be heard. We turned towards the entrance, just to see sparks flying through the crack in the door, which means that they were breaking through the door.

"Activate your armor now!" I yelled. The room was filled with a soft hum, and all soldiers in the room disappeared. Just in time, too; a Plasma Rifle came out from around the corner, and then an Elite stepped out from behind it. It said something incomprehensible, and waved in more Elites. LOTS more Elites. I walked quietly over to a hallway, and clicked my Comm twice: no response; looks like I was on my own. The evasion of the Elites brought back memories of the Hide-and-Seek games we'd play with our S.P.I. Armor. But, then again, this wasn't a game anymore.

After a good five minutes of evasion, I decided that it was time to get back to the surface. I moved back across the hallway, and poked my head out around the corner. An Elite surprised me, and I nearly stuck my head right into his chest. I pulled it back quickly and waited for him to pass by. I heard him turn down another hallway, and then walked to the Base's entrance. As soon as I stepped up onto the snow-covered ground, I heard the Base's doors slam behind me. I whipped around, only to see a hundred-some-odd green-clad soldiers standing opposite me. The two who had closed the doors were now welding the two doors shut, as to keep in the Elites. Then I realized: I was the last one out. Weird. They had gotten to work, too: They were moving the bombs towards the LZ, they were programming something into the SSFE, and they were calling in the O.N.I. transports. I walked over to the Spartan-III who was programming the SSFE.

"Umm, what are you doing?" I asked.

"Oh, hey Flynn." It was Lindsay. "I'm re-programming the SSFE to rise

up to, oh, let's say 5000 feet. Then, we're going to have it enter freefall, and hopefully it'll smash through the Titanium/Chromium base and kill everything in there."

She was as smart as she was pretty.

The Spartan-IIIs were collecting up all of their ammunition and other supplies, and the dead bodies of their comrades. The O.N.I. Transport arrived as I was going back to check on Christine, and the remaining Spartan-IIIs piled quickly and quietly into the Truck-sized ship. There were four half-ton Anti-Matter Bombs, and each one took about six of us to lift it. Damn, they were heavy. Once all the other troops got onto the ship, I boarded, thinking that this battle was a bitâ€|anticlimactic.

I walked over to Mike. "Hey man. This was a bitâ€|uneventful. I mean, we didn't lose as many soldiers as I thought we would, and we all got out relatively unscathed," I motioned to Christine, "But I wish that our first mission would end with a 'Bang'."

Mike began to laugh. It was a hearty laugh, like I had made a joke. He pulled out a VidPad and showed the screen to me. It was inside the base! I began to laugh, too, and saw an Elite talking into an Uplink crate to a black-armor clad Elite, who was obviously his superior. Then, outside the view port, we saw the SSFE platform suddenly stop, make a loud creaking noise, pause for a few seconds, and then begin to fall freely towards the ground.

"You wanted it to end with a bang?" Mike asked. "Well, just keep watching. It's gonna get a little messy."

Ship Master 'Notodee heard his comm chirp yet again. He hit a glowing green button on his wrist and the image of a Red-clad Elite shimmered up from his wrist.

"What is it, Commander?" asked 'Notodee.

"We successfully planted Anti-Matter charges at the base of the Elevator," said the Commander. "We are attempting to detonate them remotely. The adolescent Humans have trapped us beneath the Elevator's base, in some type of maintenance area. We are currently looking for a way to-" he was interrupted by a loud creaking noise.

"What was that commander?" asked 'Notodee.

"I am unsure, but it sounds like-" He was cut off once more, as the sound of creaking metal grew louder and louder. "By the Rings! What is-?" He did not finish his sentence, since as soon as he stopped mid sentence, a loud bang was heard that hurt even Ship Master 'Notodee's ears through the comm system. He winced in pain for an instant, just long enough for him to re-open his eyes and watch as the Elite's head he was talking to explode, covering the crate's lens in a deep purple goo. He sat, horrified, as he saw this happen to all other Elites in the camera's background.

He fell back in his chair, horrified. _If this is what a few, adolescent Humans can do, _'Notodee thought, _then perhaps I have

underestimated the Humans as a whole._

All he could do was watch the view screen of the _Peacemaker_, and think about what fate awaited him at the hands of his newly evaluated enemy.

2. Operation: TOUCHE

CPU Domain: Public. Programâ€|? HaxHaxHax.exe Reroutingâ€| Entering Sect.Zer: Enter A-Code: 117343â€|Access Approved.

****UNSC/ONI Biographical Records****

**CLASSIFIED**

****Warning****: These files are classified. If evidence is found that any unauthorized personnel have viewed this file, then they will be immediately stripped of their rank, discharged, and brought under investigation by The Office of Naval Intelligence.

â€|Accessing. File 01/425 of ****PROJECT: CHRYSANTHEMUM****: Delta Company

Spartan-III D001 - Flynn Harne Biographical Information

Continuing Programâ€|

Now Accessing information on ****OPERATION: TOUCHE****, second mission of Delta Company.

****OPERATION: TOUCHE****

****Date****: November 24, 2552

****Location****: Covenant Controlled Space, near Pariah III.

****240: **O.N.I. Officials gain information on the resting place of the Covenant Stealth Corvette _Twilight Compunction_.**

****534:**** The Spartan-IIIs of Delta Company are brought to Combat Alert Alpha and are dispatched to the O.N.I. Prowler _Razor's Edge_, which is standing by.

****718: **_Razor's Edge_ launches the Long Range Stealth Orbital Insertion Pods containing Delta Company from slip space.**

****720: **Delta Company emerges from slip space, invisible to Covenant Radar.**

****723: **The LRSOIPs stop above the _Twilight Compunction_'s aft hull, and Spartan-IIIs covertly enter the ship by means of refuel port.**

****725: **All Spartans enter the Corvette and make camp in the refueling bays.**

****727:**** D001-Flynn orders three fire teams to temporarily disable a critical part of the ship before making their way to the bridge.

**735: **Blue Team reaches the Coolant Transport/Intake valves.

741: Green Team reaches the Main Plasma Conduit that powers the ship.

**745: **Gold Team sabotages the central CPU of the ship, inserting a virus that locks down all communication incoming and outgoing to the ship. D001 also orders all other teams to sabotage all other parts of the ship.

**755: **The remaining Spartan-IIIs move to the bridge.

**800: **In order to eliminate all remaining forces onboard, Delta Company vents the atmosphere on the entire ship except for the bridge. After all forces are eliminated, the Spartan-IIIs execute an emergency slip space jump, just as Covenant reinforcements arrive.

**Result: **UNSC Victory, with minimal casualties.

Manuscript of Operation

O.N.I. Comms monitor Avery Wagnerite watched the screen impatiently. He had been up for more than twenty hours straight, monitoring all Covenant Tactical data within range. He was stationed on the O.N.I. Deep-Space Signal Interceptor _Recombinant_.

He was assigned to monitor Covenant Military Traffic; the Covert stuff. He was scanning everything within a 1000 light year radius, and like every other day, there was nothing important. The only thing he could find was the Covenant's Prophet leaders giving long-winded sermons about "reclamation" and "holiness", and it was more boring than a watching-paint-dry contest. He was lost, staring into space at the radio sweeps display. Occasionally, the sensors would pick up Human chatter, and would go off in a fit of mad beeping.

"Hey, Avery, want some coffee?" someone said, breaking his concentration.

"Hmm? Yeah, I guess so."

He heard footsteps leading away. _Back to the screen,_ he thought. He stared at it, watching the green line wiggle slowly at what it thought was Comm chatter. The lines of blue text slowly scrolled down the screen, giving parameters for the whispers of sound. Despite what his friends thought, he wanted to stay glued to the screen in order to catch anything important, or anything at all.

"Look, man, you're gonna go nuts staring at that screen." Said one of his colleagues.

"Hey, unlike any of you slobs, I actually wanna do my job." He said as he swiveled around.

"I respect that, but just because I don't stress every detail doesn't mean that I don't-" he was interrupted by the computer's klaxons going off. AGAIN.

"Hold that thought." said Avery.

He turned back to the screen. He looked back at the sweeps screen, and looked at the scrolling text. _Twilight Compunction?_ He thought. _I don't think that's a UNSC shipâ€|_

He checked the UNSC Starship List, scanning quickly for the name _Twilight Compunction._ No matches. He turned back to the sweeps screen. _Pariah III? Well that's Covenant controlledâ€|_

His eyes widened. The fact that he actually found something important from monitoring the Comm chatter was a triumph in itself! Usually, the Deep Space Signal Interceptors had odds of picking up an important signal were 1 in 200, so if this turned out to be an important mission, he would be up for promotion.

He leaped up out of his chair, smiling as he ran to the phone.

D001 Flynn was in the recreation center of Camp Odyssey in Arizona. He was once again reading his holopad, this time studying Earth history. Since they were in the military, the Spartan-IIIs of Delta Company had to educate themselves. He was reading up on World War II, one of the most famous wars of the 19th and 20th centuries.

I was looking over the Axis leaders from 1939 to 1945.

Boy, that Hitler was one bad mother f--

My train of thought was broken once again by the ringing alarms through the base.

Well, I guess that once again it's time to save the day.

I threw my holopad down and strapped up my boots. As soon as I had them on, I stepped out of the green-carpeted room and down the hall. Despite the fact that it was still in use, Camp Odyssey was quite run down; at least 80 years old, all of them without maintenance. It had air conditioning, which was only meagerly effective at best, and the fact the entire team was here made it some what bearable.

I was only a few feet from the briefing room when I got rammed from behind by D019 â€" Derek. He was far larger than me, even though we the same age as me. He tackled me from behind.

"'Sup fruitcake?" He said jokingly.

"Get offa' me!" I yelled as I pushed him off me. He was one of the biggest of Delta Company, and one of the strongest.

"Oh, calm down, just trying to have a little fun."

"Oh, I'll fun you!" I said as I stood up.

"What? You wanna go?" He said, puffing out his chest.

"I wanna go, do _you_ wanna go?" I puffed my chest out like him.

"Yeah!"

"Yeah?"

"Yeah!"

"Yeah?"

We looked at each other for a second, and then burst into laughter. We got to know each other since we were both leaders of rival fire teams. We would frequently scrimmage, and our rivalry soon turned to friendship.

"Well, I guess we'd better get on in there." I said, steering him back on course.

"What do you think it's about?"

"Well, it's probably important. I mean, we are Spartan-IIIs."

Travel into Covenant-controlled space, eject from a Prowler while still in slip space, infiltrate a Covenant Stealth Corvette with hundreds of troops on board, temporarily disable critical parts of the ship, capture the bridge, which would most likely be heavily fortified, and then pilot that bad boy back to the UNSC.

That was our mission. This time, however, we'd be fighting the Covenant on their turf; their ship. They had a better understanding of what we'd be doing, where we'd be going, and what we would do to get there. Luckily for us, though, the only real threats on board of a Stealth Corvette were the numbers they had. Well, their numbers and their pilots. Since all of the Covies on board a Stealth Corvette were most likely inexperienced soldiers, we wouldn't have too much trouble.

The briefing told us that we would be meeting the enemy by a new method of stealth insertion: Long Range Stealth Orbital Insertion Pods. These babies were like what the ODSTs used, only the pods would house whole fire teams and were to be launched while still in slip space. The slip space generators onboard the pods would take us out of slip space automatically when we were close enough to the target. The pods were also radar-proof, providing only the stealthiest of entries.

I left the briefing room, and was caught by Mike.

"Hey man, guess what?" he asked with a smile on his face.

"Huh-huh-huh, what?" I fake laughed back.

He looked at me like I was an idiot. "Christine is back." He replied calmly.

Christine! I had almost forgotten about her. "She's finally ready to kill some bugs?" I said enthusiastically.

"Yeah, but the Doctors said that she was still a littleâ€¦" He made a shaking movement with his hand. "Shaky, so we gotta take extra care this time around."

"Fffff!" I made a sharp inhaling noise. "That might be a problem." Mike looked confused. "She's going into another fire team, due to the losses. But, her replacement is supposedly the best in the Company."

Mike turned towards me. "Yeah, whatever. Skill doesn't make up for family." He stormed off, more mad at the "system" than at me.

We sat in the Squad Pod again, just like back in Sundsvall. We had just jumped into slip space, and it was a wild ride. I turned to the soldiers at my side. All of them no more than a year apart from me, except for Mike, and then, the new guy. D243 â€" Eric. Man, he looked nothing like a sniper. His round face was topped by a mat of dark brown hair, and his dark brown eyes flitted around, inspecting the faces in his new fire team. He had the qualities to be the squad's mascot: he liked Matt's music, he was strong, he played jokes like Carlo, and he was smart. In addition to being the Company's best sniper, he also was the highest ranking survivalist we had. He could spend an estimated two weeks out in the wilderness without beginning to suffer even minimally.

"So, uh, guys, what's the plan again?" Eric asked shyly.

"We come in, we kill bugs, we steal the ship, we save the day. Anything else, bright eyes?" Sarah yelled, making Eric flinch visibly.

"Take it easy on him, Sarah." Matt said. "He didn't mean to replace Christine." He glared at Eric.

"Knock it off, all of you!" I yelled. "Eric is the team's replacement, like it or not. It's not like teams won't be re-distributed after this mission anyway!"

Things got real quiet. Eric looked at the line of faces to his left, struggling for something to say. He looked as if he was going to say something, but then just turned away and looked at the ground. Somehow, I knew that convincing the group to accept him was going to be tougher than I thought.

I called for a final sound off, just to make sure we were all still there. A voice crackled over our comms. "This is the pilot of the O.N.I. Prowler _Razor's Edge_. We are nearing the LSZ. Please, hang on." The comms crackled out again.

Everyone grabbed the handle above their heads, which was affectionately nicknamed the "Oh-Shit" handle. Whenever there was unexpected turbulence, the handle would be grabbed, followed by an exclamation of the phrase for which it was named.

I saw out of the corner that Matt had opted for a M90-K Shotgun instead of our traditional MA5K. It featured a quick-fire mode, which allowed you to hold the trigger down and move the loading grip forwards and back to pump out shots constantly.

"Hey, Matt, that the new Shotgun?" I asked.

"Oh, why, yes it is. I thought I could use a change of pace. This bitch is supposed to be the pinnacle of Bastard-Killing technology."

"Nice. Lemme know how it handles."

Eric turned to us. "Uh, hey guys?"

"What?!?" three people said back.

"Eh," He had a defeated look on his face. "Never mind." He put on his helmet. He and I were the only ones with our helmet on. I heard his voice in my ear. "Just wait. I'll show them what I can do."

I shifted my comm to helmet only. "Eric," I asked. "How many confirmed kills did you have on our first mission?"

He paused. "Seventy four in the first two minutes, sir."

"Thirty seconds, kids." We heard out of our earpieces. I thought that this would be a good time to give a pep talk.

"Okay, this is it, guys. We're about to engage these ugly Mothers on their own turf. Now, despite the Civil War they're in right now, some of 'em got the idea that scanning for more Human colonies to destroy would be a good idea. Y'know, wipe us out so that they can concentrate on themselves. Well, I say that if they want to take something from us, first let's give something to them: how about a belly full of lead, and a pool of their own blood to drown in! Am I right?!?"

A few Hoo-rah!s buzzed out of my earpiece, and I could tell that they were psyched.

"Mark!"

A hissing noise came from above our heads, and I heard Mike say "Uh, Is that supposed to-" he was cut off by our sudden drop. We were rocketed out of the side of the Prowler while still in slip space, and it was, like they said, a bumpy ride. We were being knocked around more than "well, it was a lot."

The LRSOIPs were shot out of the Prowler at a little over Mach speed, and our guts were pushed into our helmets.

"This---shit---isn't---worth it!" Mike managed to grunt.

The LRSOIP was screaming; the metal being scraped off the hulls like butter off a hot knife. The klaxons inside were blaring, and were

partially drowned out by the hull screeching.

"Ten more seconds!" Sarah shouted.

The ten seconds seemed like hours, and I felt like I was in hell. Being squished like that could cut off blood flow to parts of the body, which would require amputation. I hit the pad on the LRSOIP and we slowed down. Slowly now; if we went to fast, we would get circulation issues and have one massive head rush " one that could end a life. So I sit, and wait to feel my arms again: Yep. I wait to feel my legs again: Yep. I wait to see if I can breathe again: Yep. I let out a sigh.

"Okay, guys." I said between pants. "The anti-momentum thrusters should fire any second now." We heard the rockets begin to thrust, and began to slow down.

"Hey, Flynn?" I heard Matt say.

"What?"

"I need to change my pants."

The Pods stopped at a close hover right above the Covenant ship. We were frozen in space twenty feet away from a ship that was built with intentions to destroy us, and they didn't even know we were there. The Stealth Corvettes that the Covenant used had no shielding as to make them faster than their fighting counterparts.

"Secure your helmets; lest ye have your eyes sucked from your sockets!" said Carlo playfully. We heard sharp hissing, followed by a clamping noise.

"Monitors online," I saw five green blips appear in the upper right hand part of my visor. "Okay. Let's go!" I slammed a big, red button on the side of the pod, with the expectation that the door would rocket off. Instead, it lazily folded down by hinges attached to the bottom of the pod. We unhooked our seatbelts and floated towards the hull of the ship. There was a large black "door", for lack of a better term; and that was where the ship refueled. There was one on either side, but we took the aft side. I could see a whole bunch of other green clad soldiers floating towards the fuel intake valve.

"Activating S.P.I. Armor." I whispered into my comms, and I saw all of the soldiers who were there an instant ago disappear. I hit the button, and saw my armored body disappear. I threw a Spoofer onto the fuel intake valve. The Spoofer is lingo for the automatic door openers that the Marines use. They were guaranteed to crack any Covie door, "or your money back!" Right now, however, was not the time for a money back guarantee. If we had to blow the doors, our presence would become known and the ship would jump out of the system. Failure was not an option.

The Spoofer's three red lights went green one by one, and I let out a sigh. _Now's where it gets tough_, I thought.

Once all of the troops were indoors, we scanned for atmospheric density. It was clear, so we spoofed the doors to keep 'em locked. We took off our helmets, and sniffed at the air. It was thick with the stench of coolant, one of the most sweetly-disgusting smells you would ever experience.

I made sure that everyone was okay, and took Mike to find Derek. We found him, with his helmet off, holding hands with another soldier. They were talking, and Derek was laughing. And not man-laughing, either. He was giggling.

I walked over. "Hey Derek. What's up?"

"Flynn, this is Kaylee." He said, motioning to the figure next to him. She removed her helmet, and I could see her face. It was weird; she had a face that I couldn't recognize, like I never met her before. She was very skinny, and short, too. Her long chestnut hair fell down to beneath her shoulders, and she had a smile like a cheshire cat. She was laughing, too.

"Pleased to meet you." She said courteously. She stuck out her hand. I shook it, and I noted that she had a weak handshake. I can tell a lot about a person from their behavior, and I could tell that Kaylee was not recruited into this program: she volunteered. The volunteer kids had all the same modifications we had, but were usually smaller in build and weaker. They also were kind of jumpy. I pulled my hand back.

"Well, good for you two. Happy that you found someone in this mess of a war." I said, forcing a smile. A relationship during war was a bad idea, but if your "significant other" was fighting alongside you, then that was just a recipe for disaster. I didn't know from experience, it was just common sense. I looked back at my fire team. They all were talking, and were chatting up Eric. They gave me an excuse. "Well, I gotta go. Be seein' ya." They started talking again. Boy, I thought, that won't last long.

I walked over to what looked like a step-ladder, and whistled into my helmet. Everyone looked in my direction. I tapped my helmet twice with my index finger, which meant "Put on your damn helmets." I saw the golden visors rise to watch me. I spoke into the comms. "Okay, y'all, teamspeak only, I want no Covenant to hear our chatter. For all of you that aren't coming with us, I want radio silence."

"Wait, holdup, who isn't going with who?" I heard some one say.

"Well, we've got to disable parts of the ship in order to move to the bridge undetected. Also, so that they won't call for reinforcements or slip space jump to parts unknown. We need two other fire teams to volunteer to disable two ship parts: the Main Plasma Conduit and the Coolant Transport/Intake valves. Our team will temporarily sabotage the main CPU system by uploading an anti-protocol worm, so that their communication systems are FUBAR." A dozen soldiers stepped up. "Okay, you will be Blue team and you will be Green team. We will be Gold team. The rest of you, stay here, stay covert, and stay quiet! Also, turn on your armor. Snipers cover those doors; I'll call when you need to move to the bridge."

We stepped up to the door that branched off to the vital ship parts. I cocked my MA5K, and so did the soldiers behind me. They hit the button on their armor that enabled invisibility, and I heard a low hum come from behind me. I waved my finger in a circle above my right shoulder, telling the snipers to cover us. I pushed the green button on the Spoofer which opened the door. I hit the button on my armor, and I disappeared right as the door opened. I brought up my MA5K, and clicked my comm three times, which meant "Temporarily turn on your infrared vision." I waved my hand in a sweeping motion parallel to the floor, which told the other teams to fan out and move towards their primary objectives. I clicked my comm once more, telling them to turn it off. I headed forwards; making sure my squad was behind me at all times. The other teams had it easy, since the other parts of the ship were close to the refueling bays. The Central CPU of the ship was right in the middle of the ship. We had the longest trek.

I heard footsteps, and hit the wall. I heard the other members of my squad do the same. Just then, a Jackal rounded the corner, examining the walls. I raised my MA5K, just in case it got any ideas. It stopped and sniffed the air. I thought _Oh god, is that thing ugly. _S.P.I. Armor had a lair of coal lining the suit, which filtered out any scents which the human body produced. It made us invisible on all levels. I saw it's eyes squint, and knew it had scented us. I tensed up on the trigger. Instead of lighting up it's shield, the Jackal just kept walking straight past us. I let out a quiet sigh, and then held my breath, hoping that it didn't hear me.

It didn't.

We kept on moving towards the center of the ship. I heard a small squeak in my ear, followed by "Blue team here. We have reached the Coolant Transport Valves. Planting blocks on your mark." The coolant onboard the ship kept the engines running smoothly and helped keep the generators running without complications. They could still run, but they had a much harder time of it. I beeped my comm once, meaning "Did you hear that?" I got a click in return, meaning "Yes." We reached a door, which was lined by red lights. "Locked." I whispered. "Is there a way around?"

"Yes. To our right. A hallway." Whispered Eric.

"No, we couldn't see that at all." Said Sarah sarcastically.

"Knock it off!" I whispered into the speaker. "Move."

The sound of boots hitting the floor echoed through the hallway. Every so often, we would hit the deck after hearing the footsteps of another alien. I heard another team call in. "Green team here. We have reached the main Plasma Conduit. Waiting your mark."

It was up to us. We had to move quickly in order to evade detection. I motioned the squad to move faster and keep rifles down; speed was more important than safety.

"Damn!" I heard. I turned around, and saw Mike standing there, as plain as day, his armor reflecting the light from the ceiling. His

armor over heated.

"Mother fu-!" He yelled, slamming himself into the wall. I heard a small noise, like some one was grunting a question. I turned around, only to see a Grunt, standing and staring with his head cocked sideways at Mike in all his "glory". Before I could even raise my gun, I saw the little beast fall forwards, face slamming into the floor. There was a large blue gash in the back of his head, and could see the faint outline of a Spartan against the wall.

"Who the hell?" Said Sarah.

"You're welcome." Said Eric. He rifle-barreled the bastard in the back of the head.

Mike stood up. He walked over to Eric and held out his hand. "You're a damn fine soldier. Thank you." I could see Mike's hand moving up and down.

Yeah. I bet they'll like you now, I thought.

We entered the main CPU hub with the idea that it would be some type of massive computer with several input and output ports, with static electricity flashing all over the place. Instead, it was a small terminal sticking out of the floor with a large holographic display shimmering from the top of it. There was a single Elite monitoring the display, and a few Engineers floating about, tending to the hundreds of insignificant malfunctions that needed be attended to. A Grunt pair slept in the corner.

I motioned to Matt, then to the single door which served as the entrance and exit. This meant "Lock it down." I saw a Spoofer attach to the door, followed by a beeping noise. The door slammed shut. The Elite turned towards us, and placed it's hand over it's weapon. It cautiously moved towards the door, inspecting the purple barrier which would allow it no escape.

I clicked my comm three times in rapid succession, which meant "Take, Take, Take." The six of us all revealed ourselves, and the Elite was frozen in shock. Mike tackled the monster, punched it in the face, and then slit it's jugular with his combat knife. The racket awakened the Grunts, who were quickly put down with shots from Sarah and Carlo. The few Engineers were killed by Matt and his pistol, and Eric sniped out the cameras in the room.

Once they all were good and dead, I jumped on the computer port. I typed like mad, looking for the communications array codes. After finding them, I inserted a disk that contained a virus; one so bad that it would take months for the Covies to decrypt it or find the right password to disable it. There was a five second boot-up time, and as soon as it was ready to download, I signaled the other squads. "Now."

A shockwave rumbled through the ship, the lights dimmed, and the computer in front of us wailed. It worked. The ship was fried, so to speak. "Remaining Spartans, the ship is dead. Proceed to the bridge. And, since our presence is no longer a secret, don't bother with camo."

We left the CPU housing area; computer still screaming.

As our squad moved through the hall way, we could hear the battle raging in other corridors. Shots rang out, the screaming of aliens could be heard, and all I could think of was _That's what they deserve._

We rounded a corner, and almost stepped right into the fire fight. Plasma rushed by so close to our visors, we could smell the air evaporating right before us. Once the firing temporarily stopped, I stuck out a hand with my middle and index fingers extended. That prompted the Spartan-III I.D. question.

"How does MCPO Mendez smell?" I heard.

"Horrible." I responded. He didn't really smell bad; it's just that any Covie would've responded "With his nose".

We moved around the corner, with invisible smiles on our visors. I hi-fived the soldier in the front, and he said "Heya Flynn!" It was Derek.

"'Sup, fruity? How goes the battle?" I remarked.

"Great. Were about fifty meters from the bridge, but I think that they're mounting an offensive."

"Sweet. Time to get some killing done."

I had ordered our fire team to stay ahead while the bulk of our forces stayed back. We would call for reinforcements, and clear the way for everyone behind us. I decided to only bring volunteers. That included our fire team, Derek and Kaylee, and Christine.

"Allright y'all, Frag 'n Clear for the rooms, Back-to-Back for hallways. Move." I said.

We moved quickly through the hallways in a ring of protection. We spun slowly, rotating in order to cover all sides and catch anything someone else missed. I was focusing on whatever was in front of me, staring down the sights with extreme intensity. I was waiting, no, _praying_ for someone to say "Here they come" or "Rifles up". It was unbearable.

"Movement. Straight ahead. It looks like a large group." Said Sarah.

Thank you, I said to myself. I ran towards a wall, hid behind a barrier attached to the wall. The hallway ahead was basically a four way intersection, with doors on all sides. There was an outcropping on each wall; a space large enough to hide with a decent ridge of protection. I held my rifle around the corner, aiming at what would come out. There was a moment of intense silence, and I could feel a bead of sweat running down the side of my head. Finally, the door ten meters away beeped and opened. Several Elites rounded the corner,

Plasma Rifles raised.

"Allright. Take, take, take."

I started firing past the corner. I didn't even aim; I could hear the shots hitting the shields of Elites. I had almost emptied an entire clip, and none of my team had returned fire. "What are you all doing?" I asked urgently. Instead of getting an excuse of a response, Eric put one finger over his visor where his mouth and put his hand palm down near the floor. I got the jist, and put my back to the wall.

The other Covenant soldiers were hidden against the wall like we were, and a single Elite was making its way towards our position. I could physically see the team tense up, and was about to let them jump on the beast coming towards us. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Eric shaking his hand at me, meaning "Hold off!" I waved my hand at the rest of the squad, and they backed down. The Elite drew nearer and nearer, and I wondered what Eric had in store. The Elite was less than five feet away, and the Elite could almost see us hugging the walls. Just in time, Eric raised his Sniper rifle and shot the Elite in the face. Its shields shattered and the bullet fragments penetrated the front of its skull. The Elite moaned softly and began to fall backwards, but Eric spun counter-clockwise and gripped tightly on his Sniper rifle's handle. He jammed the barrel through the Elite's unarmored body and kept it from falling. This naturally caused quite a racket, and several of the other Covenant soldiers poked their heads out around the corner. Eric anticipated this, and looked past the Elite which he had skewered with his rifle. He shot at the foolish aliens who had decided to watch, and their heads were inevitably detached from their shoulders. The lifeless bodies fell to the ground.

There were only a handful of Covies left in the hallway, and one Grunt in particular could be heard whimpering. In order to eliminate the rest, it would have been a good idea to merely throw grenades at their position, effectively killing any left over. Before I could give the order, Derek rushed the remaining Covenant. Kaylee, as I figured, followed him. _Wow. They'll follow each other anywhere._

"No, stop!" I yelled after them. They didn't listen; instead they stopped in front of the junction that led to the other Covies. "Crap. Covering Fire!"

"I can't get a shot!"

"Neither can I!"

Derek had taken out two Elites and a few Jackals in a matter of ten seconds, first by unloading a clip into the Jackal's shield, which reflected the bullets into whatever was next to it. In this case, it was an Elite and another Jackal. He mowed down another right as Kaylee got there. They both fired at the crowd of Covenant, and I had to say, they were quite proficient. Together, they killed the other six soldiers camping in front of us.

After the last Grunt fell, Derek and Kaylee were frozen in their stances. He turned around to face us, and yelled "That's why I decided to date her!"

We laughed and cheered, even I cracked a smile. But, it didn't last long. Kaylee turned around also, and as she went to hug Derek, one of the bodies in the pile sat up. It was an Elite; or what was left of him. The Elite reached into a panel in his armor and pulled out a small blue orb and hit the green button on it.

"Look out!" I shouted. The Elite threw the grenade and collapsed, finally dead. Kaylee quickly turned around, saw the grenade, and pushed Derek out of the way. He stumbled into the corridor right of the intersection and turned back just to see the grenade attach to her right shoulder. Derek began to shout something, but his voice was drowned out by the explosion. The floor and the walls were blackened instantly, and a wave of noise rushed through the hallways. The blast temporarily blinded us, and we were forced to shield our eyes. Once he was okay to see, however, Derek just made an incoherent noise. He tore off his helmet and stumbled towards where Kaylee was standing, and fell to his knees. He began moaning and I could tell that he was crying.

Poor Kaylee, she was totally obliterated. One part of her arm was twenty feet to our left, and her boots were flattened into tin pancakes where she stood. The helmet which belonged to her had flown into the wall to our left. He picked it up with one hand and looked it over. It was empty, and we had no clue where the head inside it went.

"Derek, Iâ€¦" Once again, I couldn't think of anything to say to comfort him. I had no clue what it must've been like to lose some one that close to you. Unless you count my Father, and I wasn't even sure what his status was.

"Sheâ€¦" He began, "She was one of the only ones who understood me." He muttered.

"Derek, let's get you back to the rest of the Company." I moved towards him.

"No. Let's not." He said standing up. He brushed away the tears coming from his eyes. "Let's kill every Rat-Bastard one of them."

"Derek, no. You need to take a break."

"No!" He yelled. "You know the Rule, Flynn: Ten-for-One! Ten-for-Fucking-One!"

"I know the rules, man, but this isn't the time for-"

"No! She was my girl, and I'm making up for her loss!" He raised his rifle.

"Derek! Stand down!"

"Okay, Flynn. I'll stand down, after you make me. Are you gonna make me?" He towered over me; at least a head taller than me, and I wasn't about to take on one of my best friends. I had the intent of talking him out of it, but he was glaring at me so hard I wasn't sure he'd be so easily persuaded.

"Hmmmâ€¦" I dropped my gun. "Okay." I jumped forwards at him, throwing my whole body into my lunge. I punched him right in the throat. The body glove was exposed right there, providing a weak spot. He reeled back, and clutched at his throat. He hunched over, gasping, and stared at me with bloodshot eyes. "I'm sorry, Derek." I kicked him in the head, and with that, he passed out.

I turned to the squad. They were frozen after watching what had happened. "Mike, Carlo, take him back to the bulk of the forces. I need a minute to think."

"Yeah, you got it, Flynn." Carlo said as began to pick up Derek's body. Mike moved to help him.

"How much further is that damn Bridge, Matt?"

"Uh, like thirty feet. It's that door up there, straight ahead."

"Good. It's time to finish this friggin fight."

"Okay, activate Camo. In the mean time, everyone get to one of the doors that leading there; I'll signal you when to enter the bridge." I said. Before I went in, I asked "Hey, does anyone have a shotgun?" Matt tossed me his Shotgun. The Marines used the M90 Shotgun; us Spartan-IIIs used the M90-K for stealth missions where tight quarters were common. Our Shotgun was lighter, higher capacity, and a bit more powerful. It utilized magazines, and each mag held thirty shells, making it look like a regular Shotgun with an extended magazine right in front of the trigger. In addition, each shell had twenty BBs, contrary to the twelve that normally went with Shotguns. It packed quite a wallop.

I gripped the trigger and could tell that I was instantly in love. I smiled and hit the stealth button on my armor. I disappeared and walked a few feet towards the door. It beeped then opened, but there was too much chaos in the bridge itself in order to hear it. Elites were yelling at each other, fortifying uplink crates as makeshift barriers, welding exposed ship parts, etc. It was all very amusing, seeing the things we once feared so much reduced to panic and mayhem.

There was an upraised platform on which a single Elite stood; it's golden armor gleaming in the light of the emergency generators. It had his hand on his lower mandibles, pacing in a circular path. It would occasionally look up at a Grunt or Engineer that had addressed them, but would then continue walking in his circular path.

He must be the Ship Master, I thought. I moved towards his position. I was careful to avoid the panicking Grunts and floating Engineers. I walked onto the ramp that led to the Ship Master's platform. It paused and looked up. I didn't recognize this as anything and just kept walking. I was less than ten feet from it, and it shouted something incoherent, although it sounded like "Shaddup!"

The noise stopped, and I stopped moving. I held up the Shotgun to it's face and turned off the invisibility. The entire bridge froze

and stared at me with my gun in it's face.

"We are taking over your ship. Do you comply?"

It drew it's Energy Sword and ignited the handle.

"Heh. Wrong Answer." I pulled the trigger, and was surprised by the energy of the gun. It kicked like a cart full of mules, and nearly broke my shoulder, even with it being properly held. The BBs penetrated the shield, penetrated flesh, and blew a good sized hole in the Ship Master's face. It fell limply, with one arm stretching out and falling over the side of the platform.

If I was on that ship alone, that would've been a suicidal action, because every Covenant soldier lifted their rifle and pointed it in my direction. I had almost two hundred blood thirsty adolescent Super Soldiers on my side, so I had good reason not to be scared.

As soon as the Elite stopped moving, the doors on all sides of the Bridge opened up and wave after wave of olive clad teenager spilled through the doors. The Covenant soldiers were wiped out in a matter of seconds without even knowing what hit them. I just watched, laughing as these soldiers; these crusaders attacked and killed these other beings for the sake of survival: their own and their species'.

The Bridge was filled with noises: the sound of inhuman shrieks, the concussive sound of rifles firing point blank into flesh, the clattering noise of shell casings as they fell to the ground. It was beautiful as war could be, and I soaked up every radiating moment.

I watched as they overwhelmed each soldier at two-to-one odds, and saw that the weaker, somewhat smarter Covenant tried to escape their slaughter. The cocky, foolish Elites decided rather to stand and die rather than run. They met their fates before any Grunt or Jackal.

Mike caught my eye as he cut a bloody swath: he melee'd an Elite with his rifle and trampled over it, then turned to mow down a pair of grunts. He whipped out his combat knife and stabbed a lunging Jackal, then in one swift motion threw it into a sheildless Elite. He then met another Elite, who was about to take a swing at him. Mike dodged the butt of the Plasma Rifle coming down at him, and it flew down inches from his face. Next, he stepped behind the Elite who had lunged at him, kicked the back of his double-jointed leg (it looked like he broke it with the force he was using), pulled out his pistol, and put a single round into the back of the Elite's head. The beast fell forwards, smashing his face into the ground. He stood hunched over his kill for a moment, and a Jackal began moving towards him. Out of no where, Christine jumped from the crowd and smacked the Jackal with a flying elbow. One smash from the butt of her Sniper Rifle ended it's life.

The other Spartans would grab and hold the creatures that tried to escape, keeping them from worming their way out of a fate that was inevitable. They would turn their prisoner around and point him towards the nearest rifle that was available. Matt was one of these, grabbing a Grunt with one hand and slashing it's Methane tank with his combat knife.

The skirmish was as glorious as it was gruesome, and I came down from the sense of superiority as soon as I was done watching my minions get their hands dirty. I turned back to the VidPanel and looked at our current position and what was on the Covenant BattleNet. We were near Pariah III, right past the border of "Human-Safe" colonies. There were only three transmissions listed on the ship's black box. The first from when the ship disembarked, the second when the ship sent out a signal that it had found all other Human Colonies, and a third right before we sabotaged the ship.

Stealth Corvettes only send transmissions of extreme importance, I thought. _What would it be doing sending a transmission as we sabotage their _- it hit me. They had called for help. They called for reinforcements as we killed the ship. _How did they know to call for reinforcements?_ I thought back, and remembered how we didn't hide the Grunt that Eric had killed. _Idiot!_ I smacked my self. _Rule #39: Always hide the body._ It was only when I heard rapid beeping coming from the holographic panel did I realize that we were in trouble.

"Pilots!!!" I shouted. "Get up here NOW!!!"

A handful of teenagers walked up to me. They all were still panting heavily from the combat, and had their helmets removed.
"Sir?"

"Listen up. I just figured out that the Covies called for backup right as we killed their ship." I explained. "We need to be out of here five minutes ago!"

"We'll get right on that, sir, just as soon as the sabotage wears off." Said one of them.

The lights then dimmed and returned to full strength, and we knew that the mechanical sabotages had worn off, and only the technological sabotage remained.

"Alright, get to a terminal, and look for a file labeled Victor-Lima-Kilo-Seven. Then input password 'Dakota'. Also," I continued, "Vent the atmosphere on the entire ship, except for the bridge. I don't want any bastard surviving this mission."

"Yes, sir!" shouted a female pilot. "It will, however take two minutes to re-key the slip space codes, sir."

"Whatever, just get it done!" I said as I turned around. I paced to the edge of the platform and saw Christine making her way towards me.

"Uh, Flynn?"

"Yes?"

"I don't think we have two minutes." She was pointing to the aft VidPanel, and there was a grayish-blue hole right next to the planet's moon. The silver dome of a Covenant Capital ship slowly came into view.

"How much longer, you guys?" I walked impatiently in a circle on the platform.

"Just a few more seconds."

"Well hurry up. We're getting hailed by them for transmission codes, codes _I_ don't have!" I noticed that I was walking in the same path that the Ship Master I had killed a few moments ago was walking in. I broke off and walked over to another pilot. "Is the atmosphere vented?"

"Vented like a window." He said with a chuckle. "I'm restoring normal pressure now. Wait, what the hell? Uh-oh!"

I felt a pang of fear shoot through me and slowly turned around. "I don't like it when my pilots say 'uh-oh'. What's wrong now?"

"The bugs in the next ship are trying to rip the Human Colony information from our systems. I'll work to slow them down, but we need to jump before they get our destination solution." He said urgently. "Hear that, girly? We need to GO." He shouted to the female pilot.

"Working on it Buster!" She replied.

"Your name is Buster, huh? Well, listen bro, I'll put you up for promotion to squad leader if you get us outta here in the next ten-" A loud whirring cut me off.

He turned around and smiled. "That would be the slip space drive activating. You might want to fasten your seat belt. Covenant ships have notoriously bumpy slip space rides, contrary to the luxurious tin cans we pile into." He joked.

The VidPanels went from a white-dotted black to a gray-streaked blue, and with that, we were gone.

3. Operation: HARBOR

CPU Domain: Public. Program? HaxHaxHax.exe Rerouting| Entering Sect.Zer: Enter A-Code: 117343|Access Approved.

****UNSC/ONI Biographical Records****

****CLASSIFIED****

****Warning****: These files are classified. If evidence is found that any unauthorized personnel have viewed this file, then they will be immediately stripped of their rank, discharged, and brought under investigation by The Office of Naval Intelligence.

|Accessing. File 01/425 of ****PROJECT: CHRYSANTHEMUM****: Delta Company

Spartan-III D001 - Flynn Harne Biographical Information

Continuing Program|

Now accessing information on ****OPERATION: HARBOR****, third mission of

Delta Company.

****OPERATION: HARBOR****

****Date**:** December 4, 2552

****Location**:** Covenant Controlled Space, Miridiem Asteroid Belt.

****1114: ****O.N.I. Officials gain information on Covenant Forces in the Miridiem Asteroid Belt: the Mobile Docking Bay, The Withstanding.

****1200:**** Fire teams Frito and Douglas of Delta Company are brought to Combat Alert Alpha and are dispatched to the O.N.I. Prowler Victoria, which is standing by.

****1326: ****Victoria launches the Long Range Stealth Orbital Insertion Pods containing Frito and Douglas from slip space.

****1329: ****The two fire teams of Delta Company land on and enter The Withstanding.

****1336: ****The two fire teams attempt to plant a NOVA warhead in the Reactor core of The Withstanding. They encounter heavy resistance.

****1343: ****Spartan-IIIs enter the Reactor core.

****1346: ****Spartan-IIIs fall back to the Emergency Launch Bays. They also disable the ship-undocking mechanisms on The Withstanding, preventing other docked ships from leaving The Withstanding's docking ports.

****1351:**** After disabling the tracking devices on an escape pod, the Spartan-IIIs leave the system via Covenant escape pods.

****1353: ****The NOVA detonates, destroying The Withstanding and all other ships docked to it.

****Result: ****UNSC Victory, with minimal casualties.

****Manuscript of Operation****

Mirtee was in the aft fighter bay of the Covenant Loyalist Destroyer-Class Persistent Foe. He had just been promoted to Major Grunt by the Brute Chieftain on board, Ristel.

Ristel was a tall, hulking Brute, yet his large size did not interfere with his ability to dance nimbly with a Gravity Hammer. Unfortunately for Mirtee, Ristel was quick to dole out punishment, so he knew that he would need to be extra careful in order to keep his new rank.

He looked at the other Grunts under his command, each of whom was napping. He thought of waking them up, but decided against it. He figured that he would let them sleep longer in order to build their morale under his command.

He agreed with himself, and decided that letting them sleep would be

a good idea, unless-

"Damn it, Mirtee! I told you that your Grunts should be awakened when you are!" Boomed a thunderous voice from behind him. Mirtee turned to face the one behind him, and it was none other than Joktanuus, a Brute Captain. He was even quicker than Ristel to hand out punishment, and Mirtee feared for his life.

"Please, mighty Joktanuus, me no mean disrespect by me actions! Me only wish to have happy Grunts as team-mates!" Mirtee pleaded.

"Hmmmâ€|" Joktanuus grunted. He said nothing more to Mirtee, but instead walked over to the other napping Grunts and began waking them up â€" violently. "Wake Up!" He would yell as he kicked them, punched them, or briefly unhooked their methane hoses. After all of them were awake, he told them, "This rude awakening was curtosy of your squad leader, Mirtee! Maybe next time, you will do what I order, not what he ordered."

The other Grunts looked angrily at Mirtee and began to stroll away to their posts. Mirtee looked out the window, and said quietly "Me knew this was going to be bad day."

"I got you now, you bastard!" yelled Matt from behind a barrier.

"Oh Yeah? I'd like to see you-" Buster started, but didn't have the chance to finish. Mike vaulted over the barrier where he was hiding, and put six purple rounds right on his face plate.

"I mean," continued Matt, "He's got you now."

We were playing paintball in the training facility in Camp Heights, Australia. It was Fire Team Frito versus Fire Team Douglas, the number two squad in Delta Company. It was Me, Matt, Mike, Carlo, Sarah, and Christine who were still in the battle field. Eric was shot out due to not watching his backside. Fire Team Douglas consisted of Lindsay, Buster, and four other Spartans whose names I didn't remember at the time. The paint-guns that we were using were simply modified Marine-standard issue rifles: SMGs, Battle Rifles, M-90s, and paint grenades.

After a week of laying low, the members of Delta Company thought it would be a good idea to have a competition amongst its remaining fire teams to see who the best squad was. For the past month, my fire team scraped and shot its way into the top slot.

Of course, we didn't use our expensive SPI Armor for this competition; we instead used black, padded suits that freely fit our forms. The pads of the armor were beneath the fabric layer to allow for superb mobility. Also, we had ODST Helmets, which provided a mock HUD to show if members of our team were hit.

"Why'd you steal my kill?" Mike was asked by Matt, who was pumping another round into his M-90.

"I didn't see your name on it." Mike replied while he reloaded his BR.

"Move up, guys. That title is as good as ours." I said to the group.

We held our rifles in traditional style, keeping them up as we moved. Carlo had point, and was peeking around a corner when we saw the light blue faceplate of a member of Douglas look past a wall in front of us. They hefted an SMG up, and hosed down Carlo. We fired at them right as they ducked their head back down.

"Aww, dammit!" Carlo complained as he walked off the battle field.

"Matt!" I said.

"What?"

"Wanna wake 'em up a bit?" I asked.

"Why not? They seem a bit sleepy, anyway." he replied as he unhooked two paint grenades.

Matt put his back to the wall and handed me a primed grenade. He then threw one over after I threw his, and we waited for a few seconds. A foul expletive and a couple of hearty "pows" later, Matt and I lifted up Sarah to confirm the kills.

"Two down, three to go." She said with a hint of satisfaction in her voice.

We put her down and continued around the corner. The only three left were Derek, Lindsay, and one other.

"Be on your guard, folks. They could be anywhere." I said as I motioned Matt, Christine, and Mike across an open path. They were almost there, when the stuttering blast of an MG was heard. The three looked over right as the front of their armor was hosed down in purple goo. They all yelled in disbelief, and dropped their rifles as they walked off the field.

It was just Sarah and I left behind a small barrier, while some maniac from Douglas was hosing us down with fire.

"What is that?" I asked while attempting to look out around the corner.

"It's pretty old; it's a Confetti Maker, judging by the sound of it." Sarah replied while unhooking a paint grenade. "Can you see the shooter?"

I removed my helmet and held it so that the reflective visor showed the soldier firing the Confetti Maker. "Yeah. Why?"

Sarah stepped forward and spun around. She whipped the grenade with what I could tell was all her strength. She sat back down and I looked back into the visor. I saw a small black orb connect with the head of the shooter, and he went down like a rag doll. The grenade exploded, spraying white paint up into the air.

"Two to go." She said.

Sarah began to run out into the open, BR in hand, but I grabbed her foot and held her back. I held up one finger and waved it, the sign meaning "wait". I looked around, and found a large rock. Casually, I tossed it over my shoulder and into another barrier a good 10 feet ahead of our position. It made a loud "clang", followed by the peppering fire from the remaining members of Douglas. I made a motion with one finger to the approximate spots where they were, and ordered a flanking maneuver for them.

We headed in different directions, Sarah went left, and I went right. The two remaining members of Douglas kept on pounding away at the barrier where they thought we were. I suppose that was the reason why they were only second best; they put so many rounds on a target that it was almost impossible for them to miss.

I stopped a few feet behind the shooter on the right, and waited a moment before they had to reload. Once I heard the click-and-unclick of an SMG and a BR I jumped on the shooter with the SMG. While we were rolling, the other who was watching the scuffle was assaulted by Sarah.

I pinned the shooter, and said simply "Gotcha."

"Like hell you do!" came the reply. It was Lindsay; I could tell due to her southern accent. She fumbled for her pistol, and began to pull it out.

In response, I unsheathed my "sword", which was actually just a slightly-electrified glowing baton. The idea of the "sword" was that it simulated a combat knife's behavior. One tap and you were out. I brought it down dangerously close to her faceplate, without touching it. She put her pistol against the side of my head, tensing up on the trigger.

We sat there for a moment, without moving, seeing who would do what.

"Your move." She said nonchalantly.

I tapped the end of the "sword" to her face plate. "Thanks." I replied.

"I can't believe that I wrote you a frikkin' blank-check like I did." Lindsay said angrily as we walked to the post-game lobby. I was just walking back from the field, and the rest of Frito was already celebrating our victory.

"Well, I've done stupider things." I said, as I recalled what I did to save Christine during our first deployment. "I've seen dumber things, too." I continued, remembering Kaylee.

"Yeah, well, now I'm gonna get dogged by the rest of my squad for not pulling through." Lindsay replied. "They're gonna think-"

The rest of her comment was cut off by an alarm going off inside the room.

"Well, folks," a very tired-looking Buster said, "Here we go again."

I went over the briefing in my head as I suited up: board a Covenant Mobile Docking Bay which is full of Brutes, an enemy Delta Company hadn't faced before, get to the Central Fusion Core and plant a NOVA super-nuke, and get off the ship before it was too late.

Piece of Cake, I thought as I slapped on the final pad of my SPI Armor.

"_Attention all Spartan-IIIs: This is the captain of the ONI Prowler_Victoria_, Adam Moody. Take off in five minutes, I repeat: Five minutes." _ Said a voice through the Barrack's speaker.

"Hey, Flynn!" a voice came from outside my door. Carlo and Matt stuck their heads around the corner of the door frame, smiling like idiots.

"Get your stuff together, Boss!" Matt said.

"'Cause it's time to kill us some aliens!" Carlo finished, and let out a cowboy-like whoop.

"I'll be right there." I replied. I grabbed my MA5K and a few clips of Ammo, and rushed outside. In front of me, the other members of Frito were conversing with the troops from Douglas. They all were talking about the paintball match that had finished only minutes before.

"Man, when you hit me with that grenadeâ€¦"

"Nice shot on that one kidâ€¦"

"Next time I won't be using a Battle Rifleâ€¦"

"I think he crapped his pants when I shot himâ€¦"

"Did not!"

"They were on the ground looking' at each other for a long timeâ€¦"

They weren't saying anything of particular importance. I walked up to the group and whistled, which was accompanied by a flick of the hand, which signified "move out". They groaned and grabbed their packs, saying goodbye to the members of Douglas.

"See you ship-side." Mike said to one of the other soldiers. He then walked over to me. "Wassup, Flynn? You in the mood to kill some Apes?"

"God-damn right, I am!" I replied enthusiastically. "These hairy bastards don't have _anything_ on Delta Company."

Mike beamed, and replied simply, "Hell, yeah!"

"God-dang-it, I'll never get used to that." Eric said as our Squad-Pod began to slow down. After roughly an hour of Slip space flight, we would finally be able to stretch our legs - and use our guns.

"Ready for deployment, guys?" asked Christine.

She received a chorus of confirmations and punched in the unlock code. "Six-Seven-Oh-Three-Nine." A near-silent "beep" rang, and the door began its unlocking process.

"Secure helmets!"

A series of "whishing" noises could be heard, followed by the green acknowledgement lights appearing in the top right corner of the HUD.

"Activate Thermal-Imaging and deploy Stealth!"

Several more acknowledgement lights appeared in the HUD, as the soldiers next to me began to disappear. _All right,_ I thought, _here we go_.

The door opened, and the seatbelts in the squad pod unbuckled. We floated freely through space. It would take at least five minutes for Frito to get to an area where we could get into the ship - without alerting every soldier onboard _The Withstanding_.

After half a minute of dead silence, I raised Matt on the Comm.

"Hey, buddy, you got any songs that would get us psyched up for the impending battle?"

"Eh, two secondsâ€¦okay. Beaming it now." The pounding noise of electric guitars filled the Comm speakers. After only a few seconds of listening to it, I contacted Matt again.

"Hey, man, what is this tune called?"

"This is 'The Trooper' by Iron Maiden." Matt replied. "Pretty kick-ass, huh? Oh sh-"

Suddenly, the music shut off, and the eerie silence filled the senses again.

Carlo began to question Matt, but he immediately shut up. The thermal imaging crapped out; it seemed like the energy coming from the members of Frito were suddenly dwarfed by something overhead. We were forced to switch to regular vision. Nobody moved. Even Carlo, who had rolled over to look at Matt, was frozen in the awkward position of flying with his belly towards a Covenant Craft. He turned his stealth off upon seeing the Covenant Destroyer.

Now, I had seen Carlo do some pretty stupid things, but this was, by far, _the_ dumbest thing I'd ever seen him do: he _waved_ at the passing vessel. Enthusiastically, to boot. My jaw dropped, and I could almost sense that everyone else's had also. Destroyers had enough fire power to almost single handedly take out a UNSC Battle

cluster, and Carlo was waving at it like it was a childhood friend. The sensors on those craft were so sensitive that they could pick up the movement that a fly made blinking.

But, much to our surprise, the Destroyer did not do anything. It did not slow down, speed up, open fighter bays, or anything else. It just continued on its original course. It flew right over us and proceeded to dock with The Withstanding.

Carlo rolled back over, only to see all of us looking at him. "What?" he asked innocently, as he re-cloaked himself.

At that point, everyone began to laugh at Carlo's hair-brained antic. Part of the laughter was the irony of it all, and the other was disbelief.

It was only then that I noticed that Mike had a large, black case attached to his back, next to his MA5K. It was at least a meter long, and a bit oddly shaped: almost like a microphone.

"Hey, Mike! What's in the case?" I asked him.

"Oh," he said with a sense of satisfaction in his voice, "You'll see."

Mirtee stared out the window at the empty blackness of Space. He wondered if anything of interest would happen to him today that didn't involve a demotion.

"_Attention, crew. This is Ristel. We will be docking with The Withstanding momentarily. Secure your possessions."_

Mirtee put his Plasma Pistol on a magnetized rack and looked back out the window. It was then that he saw something odd: a small green spec was floating alongside the ship. He pulled out his binoculars, and increased magnification. What he saw horrified him: It was a humanoid-shaped being, clad in the green of the Humans, and it was moving its hand rapidly back and forth. Then, it rolled over and disappeared.

Now, normally, Mirtee would have called this in as soon as he saw it. But, due to the argument he had with Joktanuus, he knew that if what he saw was just his imagination, he would be severely beaten. Mirtee contemplated it for a moment while he put his binoculars in his backpack compartment. No, he thought, me sure it was nothing.

—

After four more minutes of drifting, we finally made contact with a set of empty docking bay doors of The Withstanding. The thermal imaging showed that the other fire team was already waiting for us.

One of the smartasses from Douglas was floating in a reclined position, and he even asked "What took you guys so long?"

"Eric, set up the Spoofer, we're breaking in." I said.

"Roger that, boss-man." Eric replied.

He placed a small, grey box on the large, black doors of the refuel bay, and punched in the access code. The small LCD display showed three red lights " which progressively changed into three green lights. The display flashed green three times, and the large jet-black doors opened. The best thing about the Spoofer was that it not only opened the door, but it hacked the computer network so it looked like nothing had happened.

Each of the formless blurs who were soldiers floated in to the docking bay. I stayed on patrol to make sure that everyone got inside safely, and felt that it was a good idea to observe my surroundings. _The Withstanding_ was truly massive, at least the length of two MAC Canons, maybe two and a half. There were several ships docked to _The Withstanding_, at least twenty-two, if not more. The thing that struck me oddest of all was the fact that nothing, not a single scanner had picked up Carlo's antic and raised an alarm. _But,_ I thought, _that's all for the better._

It was very fortunate for us that un-used docking bays were always kept empty, or else we would be heavily peppered by fire right now.

"Well, hangar secure. What now, Flynn?" asked Christine.

I thought for a moment to formulate the battle plan. I motioned to Sarah to display the holo-map of _The Withstanding_. It flickered to life in a bright blue.

"We are here," I pointed to a small purple chamber. "But, we need to get here." I ran my finger across a series of criss-crossing paths. "Easy, right?"

The other soldiers nodded.

"Wrong." I continued. "If you look here, there is a trench-like path that overlooks a hill, which is completely open. The only cover there is inside the trench, so we'll have to move quickly."

More nods.

"All right. Move out!"

Mirtee had been called to Ristel's personal chamber. As the Brute Chieftain for the entire Drakk Legion, he was instantly given leadership status upon boarding _The Withstanding_.

Mirtee walked past several hulking Brute guards, all of which were snorting and speaking to each other in hushed voices. He finally reached the massive chamber doors; they "beeped" and opened.

Ristel was staring out of a view port at the inky blackness dotted by white.

Mirtee felt that he shouldn't interrupt until spoken to. He stood quietly near the door, until Ristel spoke.

"Guards, leave us." Ristel said. The large, red armored ape-like creatures grunted a response and left the room.

"Hmmm." Ristel sighed. "Mirtee, come here." Mirtee walked over quietly. He secretly had no clue what was going on, but he was scared nonetheless.

"Mirtee, why did you do it?"

Mirtee paused. "What?"

"This recording from your binoculars â€" it is on screen now â€" is quite alarming."

Mirtee turned around to see the screen flash to life. It displayed the blackness of space, which enveloped a small dot â€" a small _green_ dot. Mirtee felt his heart jump into his throat.

"There appears to be a humanoid figure flying through space in dangerous proximity to our ship, the _Persistent Foe_. Now, if my predictions are correct, these are the same soldiers from the initial assault on Earth and the loss of the _Twilight Compunction_."

At that time, images from the two mentioned occasions appeared next to the picture of the creature that Mirtee saw earlier today. They all had the same armor. Upon seeing this, Mirtee's simple mind put the pieces together: these human soldiers were possibly onboard _The Withstanding_. Now, Mirtee feared for his life: not just for what might befall him at the hands of Ristel, but what the humans would do to him if they found him.

"Now, would you mind telling me-" Ristel continued, "-why you didn't report this as soon as you saw it?!?!" Mirtee noticeably flinched at the last question. He covered his face with his forearms.

Ristel stared for a moment, and then let out a booming laugh. Mirtee, confused, let himself chuckle a bit, too.

"Do not worry, Mirtee. I am not punishing you. You are being promoted! By not sounding out a general alarm, we now have an element that was robbed from them: Surprise!" Ristel grabbed at the air and clenched his fist. "We will covertly let select lances know about the threat, and we will crush them like the insects that they are!" Ristel concluded with a laugh.

Mirtee was surprised. All he could muster as a response was "Wait, me get promotion?"

"Ha! Yes, you will now be a personal bodyguard â€" to me! We will give you new, shining armor, a Plasma Rifle, and even a Fuel Rod Cannon!"

Mirtee smiled. _This turned out to be good day after all!_

Frito and Douglas were now in the trench like path, with their stealth engaged. I made sure we all were on the same path, and then waved up the rest of the group. Eric walked in front of me, and snaked a fiber-optic cable over the top ledge.

"Uh-oh."

I sighed. "Dammit Eric, you know I hate that word. What is it?"

"Look." He pushed a series of buttons on the cable's base, and the video was sent to my HUD. There were ten groups of Covenant troops, each one with a large red-armored Brute and several Grunts of various armor colors. In the middle and behind the line of soldiers was a Brute in shining gold armor, clutching what Intel reported to be a Gravity Hammer. Next to him stood a Grunt in white armor hefting a Fuel Rod Cannon.

"Folks, hold up. Check your weapons." I heard the clicking of rifles being loaded and cocked, and unlimbered my MA5K. "Guys, turn off your stealth. It's not like they're givin' us a parade." The olive-clad soldiers reappeared right next to me. Each of them was looking at me, wondering what to do next. "Spread out. Keep moving; make them think that there are more of us than there really is." They moved across the trench, traveling alone or in groups of two or three.

I turned to Mike, who decided to stay near me. "Hey, bud, want to get this party started?"

"Ha. Watch this." He flipped out a Combat Knife and twirled it in his hand. He held the long, black blade between his index finger and thumb, stood up, and flung the knife at the line of Covenant.

The knife made a whishing noise as it traveled through the air. I followed the path it flew along, and saw it make contact with one of the Brute Captains' heads, burying itself handle-deep in the alien's brain. It fell backwards; the Grunts who were gathered around the now-deceased Brute began to run around, arms flailing as their feet splashed in a puddle of black blood.

"Nice throw." Matt said as he hi-fived Mike.

The Brute with the hammer yelled and waved his fist at our position. As he did, several Grunts raced at our position, followed by the Brutes who commanded them.

We all fired, blasting away at the oncoming line of aliens. Only a few of the Grunts fell; two members of Douglas concentrated fire on a Brute captain. At least twenty of the rounds connected, but the Brute did not fall. There were several dark holes pock-marking his chest and arms, but he was not slowing down, and his eyes were growing bigger, wild with rage. He raced forwards, dropping his gun, towards our position. The Grunts behind him pulled out small, black egg-shaped objects and threw them on the ground. The instant they hit the ground, wells of purple energy flew up from the eggs, and the Brutes and Grunts moved to hide behind them. _Energy Shields,_ I thought.

The other Covenant soldiers were advancing behind the shields, so as not to be hit by potentially fatal bullets. All but the Chieftain,

who still stood smugly on his pedestal next to the white-armored Grunt.

The only one not behind the shields or out of range was the berserking Brute, and at least three Spartan-IIIs were firing on him. Nothing short of a rocket would stop the bastard.

"Oh, what a perfect time to bring out 'Mittens'." Mike said with a giggle.

"What the shit are you talking about?" Christine yelled over the Comm. as she shot the energy shields with her Sniper Rifle. Despite the well-aimed shots she and Eric were placing on the shields' power sources, no visible effects were taking place.

The Brute was nearly ten feet away, and I decided to put a stop to his charge. I aimed my rifle between his eyes, and pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened.

I depressed the trigger repeatedly. Still no result. It was only then that I realized-

"Shit! Jam!" I yelled. I immediately released the cartridge, pulled the rotating-bolt action several times, and reached for another clip, but by then it was too late. The Brute had reached the trench, side-armed a handful of Spartan-IIIs, and picked one of them up by the torso.

The menacing Brute roared right in the face of the Spartan clenched in his hand. He reeled back with his right hand and delivered three powerful punches to the side of the Spartan's head, and threw him from the trench into the open. He turned to face the others who had not yet been knocked down and roared. I frantically attempted to slam another cartridge into my gun, but fumbled and couldn't put one in.

Just as the Brute took a step towards us, a revving noise from behind was heard. The Brute, who was hunched over on all fours, froze and looked at the source of the noise.

I turned around to see Mike, holding a strange object. Not just any object, either.

He held a chainsaw. The jet black chain was revving at an incredibly fast speed, and the olive green handle was clutched by Mike's gloved palms.

He leaped with the agility of a professional gymnast, and before the Brute could voice his displeasure, Mike's friend "Mittens" was brought down hard on the beast's left shoulder. The saw ripped away fist-sized chunks of meat as it drew a diagonal path through the beast's torso.

Black splatters covered the front of Mike's armor. Once the Brute was in two distinct pieces, Mike turned to face us and depolarized his faceplate. His smile took up most of his face, and he spoke to us through grit teeth.

"Now, was that some awesome shit, or was that some awesome shit?" Mike said enthusiastically.

The congratulations were cut short by the yelling of the Spartan who was forcefully removed from the trench.

"Medicâ€¦ oh Godâ€¦ my headâ€¦" He mumbled before he passed out.

"Doug!" Lindsay yelled through her microphone.

"Crap! He needs help!" Carlo shouted.

"No! If anyone goes down there, they're dead, too!" I said out loud.

Carlo was the closest to the downed Spartan â€" twenty feet away. He looked at "Doug", then back at the rest of us.

He dropped his MA5K and scrambled out of the trench. He sprinted towards the downed Spartan, and picked him up on his back.

"Carlo, No!" I yelled.

The Covenant bastards knew how to pick their moments, and this was one of them. As soon as Carlo picked up his wounded comrade, he came under fire from the Covenant. Green, red, and blue plasma along with slow moving purple needles were fired at his position. Most of the shots missed, but at least three or four of the shots connected with his back. Each time I saw his body jerk from being hit with searing hot plasma or explosive needles, my heart skipped a beat. Despite being hit from multiple directions, he did not drop Doug. He kept walking; limping back to the trench.

He finally made it, throwing Doug in before he fell in after him. He landed within two feet of me. I dropped my gun and ran over to his body. I yanked off his helmet so that he could get some air.

"Sir?" he asked with a half smile on his face.

"What?" I said, voice stuttering.

"I think I've been hit."

The smile disappeared from his face. His body went limp. He was gone.

Tears streamed down my face: tears of anger, of sorrow, and of pain. Each one ached for revenge.

I turned his body over, and what was left of his back was scorched black by plasma and explosive purple shards. His bronze skin was torn and singed, and had bubbled over from the heat. The burns went so deep that the back of his ribcage and spinal cord had been scorched a jet black.

"Guysâ€¦"

"What? What happened?" came the voices from the comm.

"Carlo's gone."

The comm. was completely silent for a full ten seconds. I heard noise, and turned to see Mike, Sarah, Matt, and the rest of Frito behind me. They all were crying, too.

I got up to brush the tears away. I pulled my helmet back on, took a deep breath, and turned to tap Eric on the back. My sadness had suddenly become blind anger.

"Yeah, man?" he said, fighting back tears.

"Give me your fucking Rifle." It was on the ground a few feet away from him. He picked it up and placed it in my hands.

".50 Cal in the clip?" I asked. He nodded.

"Good." I replied, as I pulled the bolt-action.

I linked the smart-scope to my HUD, and sent the feed to the other members of Frito. I centered on the Chieftain, who was still standing behind the other troops. It was obvious from the smirk on his face that he felt confident that he would win.

"Yeah. Smile, motherfucker. Because your assâ€¦isâ€¦"

Mirtee stood next to Ristel. As his new personal guard, he had to be with him â€" or, at least near him - at all times.

Ristel looked through his binoculars at the position where the humans were. One had tried retrieving a fallen comrade, and was punished by being hosed down by plasma.

"Ha! One of them is surely no more! That will show them how merciless we truly are." He said smiling. Ristel turned to face Mirtee.

"Yes, thanks to you, Mirtee, we were able to stop this threat before they could truly do any damage. When the Prophets hear of this victory, we shallâ€¦" Ristel rambled on. In truth Mirtee was busy watching the battle. He was paying attention to the human warriors who fought so hard to save a single wounded soldier. A fellow Grunt would merely have left the wounded soldier, and he admired the Humans for their bravery and commitment.

"â€¦yes, Mirtee," he continued, smiling, "You have done very-"

A whining noise and a loud "splut" snapped Mirtee back into reality. He was unsure why Ristel had stopped speaking, so he turned to see if something was wrong. When he went to look at Ristel's face, he knew something was very wrong.

The entire upper half of Ristel's head was gone. All that remained was the lower jaw, which hung from the neck limply. A small spurt of black blood came from the newly opened throat of the Brute Chieftain, and his dead body fell forwards and off of the floating pedestal that it had previously stood on.

Mirtee was so shocked, so frightened, that all he could do was utter

a mere "moop" and fall to the ground, passed out.

"â€|grass." I finished.

"That's right. Make 'em pay." Mike said angrily.

"Hell yeah, that'll open up his fucking sinuses." Sarah said harshly.

I turned off the video feed, and called for a regroup of Frito and Douglas.

Everyone returned to my position, and I handed Eric his rifle back.

"All right. We've lost too much just sitting around, so we need to â€ Hey!" I said as one Spartan walked into the huddle a few seconds late.

"What?" he asked.

"Your name Doug?"

"Yeah. Why?"

I motioned Mike to follow me, and he dropped "Mittens". I picked Doug up by his right arm, Mike by his left, and we dragged him over to Carlo's body. He didn't know what was going on, until we got closer to our destination.

"You see this?" I asked angrily. Doug noticeably averted his gaze from Carlo's body. "Yeah, you'd better see it. 'Cause he died trying to save you!" I yelled.

Mike leaned in close to Doug's ear. "Yeah. You'd better earn this, you motherfucker." We pushed him back into the trench wall, but his gaze was set on what was once Carlo.

"Guys, we're all upset about Carlo's death, but we have bigger issues now." Christine said. It seemed as if she was still crying.

"Yeah, she's right. When Flynn went all beast-sniper on that Chieftain, they decided that a frontal assault would be a good way to 'avenge' him." Matt finished. "They're headed this way."

Almost one hundred aliens, each of whom was berserk with rage, running right at thirteen teenage soldiers? No way, I thought.

"Grab your gear, guys; we gotta get to the Reactor Core!" I strapped my MA5K on my back and picked up Carlo's body. We all made a beeline to the doors which led right into the ship's reactor.

"Eric, get in first, make sure that door is locked once the last of us get in there!" I yelled over my comm.

"You got it." He said as he raced past each of the other Spartans. He got in first, whipped out his Spoofer, and began punching the key

code at a ridiculously fast speed.

One by one, each of the Spartans ran into the reactor core. I could hear and smell the plasma flying by; nearly singing my face and arms. As soon as I got in with Carlo's body, the doors flew shut and glowed red, signifying "lockdown".

"All right." I said as I gently put down Carlo's body. "Buster, Eric, get to work readying that NOVA. We need to be out of here five minutes ago!" They immediately set down the large black case attached to Buster's back, and opened it.

"Phew! Finally got _that_ monkey off my back!" Buster joked.

Eric unhooked a small, black box, and ran it over to me.

"Here, man, make sure to leave them something to remember us by." He said as he hurried away. I looked it over, and saw a large red button that read "Record". I knew that each NOVA was able to be "personalized", as soldiers called it, but I didn't know ONI would set us up with one like it.

How fortunate. I thought.

"Hey, Lindsay!" I yelled.

"Yeah?" she asked walking over; not taking her eyes off of the door which we ran in.

"I don't want _any_ of those aliens leaving this Docking Station alive. You get me?" I said.

She contemplated it for a second, and then looked back at me. She swept two fingers across her faceplate, indicating her smile.

"Computer terminal's right over there." I pointed near the exit door.

She ran over and began typing like mad.

Left to my own devices, I looked over the small black box Eric had handed me. I wondered what would be the proper thing to say in my situation. A thought popped into my head, and I thumbed the red button.

"All right, people, let's move, move, move!" Matt said as he waved us all into the Covenant escape pod.

Mike and I had Carlo's body, and we were moving him into the escape pod.

Once he was down, I opened up the ONI Spartan-III files, and added his name to the MIA list.

Spartans never die. I thought as I looked back at his body.

"Okay, we are ejecting now!" Buster said as we were fired out of _The

Withstanding_. A few seconds later, he said "Engaging slip space driveâ€|Now!" The pod was thrust forward as we lurched into slip space. The eerie gray filled the cabin with an odd glow.

I sat down next to the other members of Frito. Each held their head in their hands. I decided not to hold it back any longer, and began to sob, too.

Eric, still crying, turned towards me. "Umm, Flynn?" He sniffled.

"What, man?"

"What did you record on the black box?"

I smiled. "Can't say, man. I don't want to jinx it."

The Brutes' pounding on the locked Reactor room door had finally payed off, and Covenant troops poured into the chamber.

They looked high and low for any signs of the Humans, but found nothing.

Finally, Mirtee walked in. He had regained his composure, after fainting at the sight of Ristel killed. A path was cleared for him, towards the Reactor Core. Near it stood a large silver ring that had several bulges in it. On the ring was a red display panel with symbols that were rapidly diminishing â€" and disappearing.

"What are you?" Mirtee quietly said to himself. As soon as he did, though, what sounded like a voice recording came from the bulging silver ring. Mirtee listened, but couldn't make much sense of the words. It sounded like:

"_Mogliazzi, Carlo! Spartan-III! Service Number: Sec-Z D-017-CM! He was a great soldierâ€|but a better friend."_

At that point, the red symbols disappeared, and a blinding white light enveloped Mirtee, the Reactor core, and all of the ships docked to _The Withstanding_. Mirtee, for the first time in his life, felt at peace.

4. Operation: HIVE

CPU Domain: Public. Programâ€|? HaxHaxHax.exe Reroutingâ€| Entering Sect.Zer: Enter A-Code: 117343â€|Access Approved.

UNSC/ONI Biographical Records

**CLASSIFIED**

Warning: These files are classified. If evidence is found that any unauthorized personnel have viewed this file, then they will be immediately stripped of their rank, discharged, and brought under investigation by The Office of Naval Intelligence.

â€|Accessing. File 01/425 of **PROJECT: CHRYSANTHEMUM**: Delta

Company

Spartan-III D001 - Flynn Harne Biographical Information

Continuing Programâ€|

Now accessing information on ****OPERATION: HIVE****, fourth mission of Fire Team Frito.

****OPERATION: HIVE****

****Date****: December 10, 2552

****Location****: Platea, Arctic Moon of Super-Jovian Planet, Ifinitus

****1320****: ONI Officials receive information on a Radiation Spike on a small moon. Further Surveillance reveals the spike to have emanated from a Covenant Weapons Facility.

****1330****: Spartan-III Fire Teams Frito, Zealous, and Ryan are brought to Combat Alert Alpha, and are dispatched to the ONI Prowler _Steadfast_, which is standing by.

****1445****: Spartan-IIIs arrive in-system, and are inserted via LRSOIPs.

â€|â€|â€|. ****ERROR OCCURANCE****. Remaining Transcripts unobtainable.

Reattempting connectionâ€|connection failed.

Proceed to Manuscript? Y/N

â€|

****Manuscript of Operation:****

Yorra was perhaps the only Brute whose IQ was not equal to that of a Grunt. He stood in his quarters, looking over his appearance in a mirror nearby. Unlike the other Brutes he had known, he liked to keep himself clean and neat-looking.

Yorra was happy where he was, but, at the same time, disappointed. He was the only one of his intelligence quotient working in the facility besides the Drones, and they weren't the best at conversations. He pondered how he had gotten himself where he was that day.

Yorra had been drafted into the military as soon as he became of age. At his training camp, he constantly outdid even the leaders of his unit in intellectual exercises, though he was a bit behind the others in physical activities. Nonetheless, he graduated, and was put in charge of his own lance. However, his arrogance towards his superiors and his refusal to obey even the simplest of commands were what landed him in the _Hive_, the Covenant Loyalist Weapons development complex.

It was a multi-floored building concealed underground, with a small structure on the surface to permit munitions, supplies, and other necessities into the base. The _Hive_ was located on an icy moon of

the Super-Jovian Planet Ifinitus. This particular icy moon was named Platea. Yorra hated the cold, and the lack of company, but his job was what truly made him happy.

He was the Head-of-Development for the entire complex, and he decided what weapons were developed and shipped where, if they were even permitted to be used. His latest design, the Type-3 Anti-Personnel/Anti-Material Grenade, lovingly nicknamed the "Firebomb", had just been shipped to every garrison in the Loyalist Army.

Yorra was currently working on a new, top-secret weapon in Level 3 of the Hive: the top-secret level. With each passing floor, the secrets " and danger - grew and grew. He had just finished his morning meal and was checking his appearance in the mirror when a light buzzed on his desk.

"Yorra?" a computerized voice asked.

"Yes, what is it?" Yorra responded.

"Sir, we have just finished testing the Mk. 4 BRAAM, the Mobile Heavy Plasma Lancer.""

"And?" Yorra asked.

"The initial firing phase gave off more radiation than we expected, sir""

Yorra turned around and faced his desk, feeling alarmed. "What are you saying?"

"I am saying that three of the Unggoy who were testing it were dead instantly, and the other two have severe radiation poisoning. They will not survive the night."

"Well, bolt on extra radiation shielding and find some more -" Yorra was cut off.

"I am not finished, sir. The amounts of radiation given off were so immense that, put simply, the energy levels could be seen from space."

Yorra felt a knot in his gut well up and begin to boil. "Well then, purge the archives. Do not let any monitors know of this. It could mean an end to us all."

"Doing so now. Do you require anything else?" the voice asked.

"No. That is " Actually, stop all work on the BRAAM. Destroy all prototypes and previous data. That is all." Yorra finished as he switched off the comm.

The knot in his gut slowly went away. He wondered if he and his crew were in any severe danger, but quickly dismissed the thought as he left his quarters.

"Damn it." Mike said as he left the ONI Administrator's office. He was called into the office for "unreasonable conduct".

I was waiting for him outside of the office. "What happened?"

"Well, basically, I'm on thin ice. My bringing of Mittens on the mission a few days ago? What's happened is I've received my first warning: one more and I am suspended."

"_First_ warning? Geez, with some of the crap you've done, I'm surprised your not on your eighth." I replied.

He punched me in the shoulder. "Well, there is good news," he continued, "When the 'admin' in there was speaking to me, he basically said that each mission from here on out would involve smaller groups of Spartan-IIIs, as to increase productivity among the Ranks. That's why some of the folks haven't been around lately: They're away on a mission." Mike finished.

"Oh, well, that's good, I guess." I replied, changing the topic. "So, what do you wanna do now?"

Mike stretched his arms over his head, and sighed. "Well, first, let's get out of this frikkin' maze of a building." Mike was right; this building we were in was fairly extensive. "Then, why don't we head to the Gym? I could use a good sweat."

"Sounds like a plan." I said with a smile. "Now, I think we take a leftâ€|?"

After a half-hour of walking around, we finally found the exit and headed to the gym. Sarah, Christine, and Eric were already there.

Eric was beating the snot out of a body bag. Sarah was at a bench with Christine, who had just finished a set of reps.

"Hey guys. What'd we miss?" Mike asked innocently.

"Nothing. Hey, I was wondering, could I talk to you Mike?" Christine replied.

Mike looked at me puzzlingly. I mouthed the words "Go on".

"Well, sure." Mike said. Christine walked away. Mike followed, flashing a shrugging gesture to me as he walked behind her.

"You want to work in?" Sarah asked.

"Sure. But could we add some weight?" I asked.

"Sure." She replied.

I added 100 pounds of weight to the bar, making it at least 350 pounds heavy. I laid down and picked the bar off of the supports, and called them out as I lifted.

"â€|Twenty-three! Twenty-four! Twenty-five!" I puffed and threw the

bar back onto the supports. I sat back up, sweating.

Sarah looked at me like I was an amateur. "Is that all?"

I was flabbergasted by her question. "It's just a what, bitch?" I said with a grin.

"Here, lemme show you how it's done." Sarah said as she put on an extra hundred pounds.

She got underneath the bar and pounded out fifty reps. She slammed the bar back onto the supports and sat up, laughing. "When you can do that, call me." She remarked, breathing heavily.

At that point, Eric walked over to where we were. "Hey Flynn. Did you just get owned by Sarah's ridiculously huge mah-sles?" He said, finishing the sentence in a bad German accent.

"Yeah, looks like it." I replied, feeling beaten. I remembered Mike and Christine, and looked over to where they were. "Look at them."

"What?" Eric asked, unaware of the situation.

"Oh," Sarah began, "Yeah, she was telling me that she needed to talk to Mike."

"What?" Eric repeated.

"Well," Sarah started, but she was stopped by a tap on the shoulder. She turned to see it was Matt.

"Hey guys." He said.

"Oh. 'Sup, little Hendrix?" I asked.

"Well, firstly, thanks for saying I'm as good as he was. Secondly, we're getting called up. It's mission time." Matt said, suddenly becoming serious.

"Oh." Sarah said, the smile leaving her face.

"Jeebus! Didn't we just go on a mission a few days ago?" Eric exclaimed.

"Yeah, but don't pretend that you don't love it." Matt said with a smile. He was punched playfully by Eric.

"All right, guys, then let's get our stuff together. Hey, someone let those two know." I said, referring to Mike and Christine.

"I'm on it." Sarah said, as she picked up a two-and-a-half pound weight. She threw it like a Frisbee towards Mike, and it landed with a "thud" near his feet. He looked towards us, surprised.

"Hey, you two, it's go time!" she yelled.

They began to walk over towards us, and we left the gym as a small mob.

"So, any idea who's going with us?" Mike asked Matt.

"Fire teams Ryan and Zealous." Matt replied.

"Hey, Derek's in Zealous." Mike reminded me.

"Well, fuck-a-doodle-do." I said without emotion. It was true; I had forgotten all about the emotions that went flying around between Derek and I onboard the Twilight Compunction. Supposedly, though, he hadn't.

I suddenly got a feeling that something bad was going to happen on this mission.

After getting suited up, the members of Fire Team Frito decided to head into the armory to personally pick out the weapons we'd be using.

Since the Brutes decided to upgrade their armor and weapons, ONI decided to do the same for us Spartan-IIIs.

Every weapon, bullet, shell, and grenade had been upgraded in response to the new threat. Each one was also ten times more lethal than it was before.

My squad rummaged through the boxes and packages, gingerly removing each item for further inspection. I went straight for the tested-and-true MA5K.

It appeared that the MA5Ks had been upgraded: they were lighter, more efficient, and deadlier. They still were matte black, but now all the extra plating had been stripped away. Instead of a forwards hand grip there was now a fold-up pistol grip that could provide more accurate results while still providing a decent hold on the gun. They were more compact, almost looking like a cross between an SMG and a battle rifle. I opened up a clip to take a look at the ammunition, and as I suspected, it had been upgraded also. The standard 5.56 bullet was replaced by a hollow-tipped, depleted-uranium 7.62mm round. These things were so powerful they could pierce Hunter Armor if given enough time.

Mike got his hands on a few grenades. He told us how the grenades had been upgraded too, now relying more on superheated shrapnel and explosive charge, instead of the infliction of concussive trauma the old grenades relied on.

According to Eric, the Sniper Rifles were also re-tooled for the new threats. Now, instead of being all metal, the actual mechanism of the gun featured several ceramic parts that reduced weight but actually lowered jam frequency due to reduced friction. He was almost eccentric upon realizing that the new standard ammo was .50 caliber bullets. Each one was about half-a-foot long. It made the AP rounds in the MA5Ks look like grains of rice.

Finally, we looked at the new Shotguns, designated M90-K mk. 2. They were pretty much the same, except the magazines were smaller. Each one could now only carry 10 shells, but that obviously wouldn't be an issue. Each shell was a 10 gauge 3.75" Magnum. These shells, instead

of standard lead bearings, had hollow tungsten bearings in them. That meant that if the round hit something in just the right way, it would shatter, providing a secondary scatter effect.

We snapped up clips, pumped in rounds, and cocked each one of them with vicious intent.

An hour and a half after leaving the armory, we arrived on Platea, one of the moons of Ifinitus, the third largest non-star planet in the entire Milky Way.

The squad pod slammed into the ground at several hundred miles per hour, and the lights inside the small troop transport dimmed, and then flickered back to life.

"Hey, ya know, I think I'm getting used to this." Matt said.

"Yeah, me too." Said Eric.

The front door of the squad pod fell forwards, revealing a white, polar landscape. The visors on our SPI helmets immediately polarized in order to protect our eyes.

"How far are we from the base?" I asked Christine.

"Approximately one mile south of its position. The other two fire teams are north-west and north-east of the base, so we'll need to wait for them to get into position before we can assault the enemy." she finished.

"Alright let's get a move on." I said. The quiet hum of our SPI Armor began, followed by the crunching of snow beneath our feet. We moved swiftly through the snow, guns still holstered so as not to slow us down.

Seven minutes of running through knee-deep snow, and we arrived at the lip of a large hill, cresting a valley. As we climbed over top, we saw it: the top of the Covenant base. Or, at least, what we thought was the Covenant base. It was a small pill-shaped purple structure, maybe fifteen feet across and ten feet deep.

"Why's it so small?" panted Matt.

I flipped my visor mode to thermal spectrum reading. Large blooms of red and orange filled my visor. However, these thermal readings were peculiar, in that they were coming from underground. "Thermal readings indicate more activity below us." I switched back to regular optics. "Looks like that little hub is just an elevator."

"So, does that mean we're going down?" Eric asked.

"Looks like it." I smiled.

"Wait, what's that?" asked Mike. The purple surface split and glowed, and three tall, brown figures emerged.

"Brutes." Sarah growled.

"Lemme take 'em out." Eric said, reaching for his Sniper Rifle.

"No! Remember, we wait until Ryan and Zealous get into position before we do anything." I reminded him. "In the mean time, what say we do some recon?"

Eric took his hands off his rifle and crossed his arms.

I turned and set my binoculars on the Brute's position. They waved out a small group of Grunts, who were pushing what looked like a serious-looking Plasma Turret out into the snow. They let the platform hover after pushing it at least ten meters from the base, and began to place small black cubes on the platform. They hurried back away from the platform, and nodded to one Brute.

The Brute snarled something back to the little creature, and reached for something on its thigh plate. Just as it began to pull the item out, a voice in my helmet broke my concentration.

"Fire Team Ryan, in position!"

A few seconds later, we heard "Fire Team Zealous, ready!"

"Okay, people, on my order take-take-take!" I motioned to Eric to unlimber his Sniper Rifle. He did so without hesitating, and pulled back the hammer on the right side of the gun.

Things were very quiet for a second. The only sound came from the distant barks of the Grunts and from the gently blowing arctic wind.

I exhaled. "Now."

The noise from the rifles was heard from all directions, and each of the Brutes fell, headless or nearly so. The Grunts barely had time to realize that their superiors were dead before they were shot down by a second volley of Sniper fire. Six shots, six kills.

We waited a second, confirming the kills. "I see no movement." Eric confirmed.

"All right then, move closer to the structure. We need a few people to hide the bodies, so get on that, and above all else, don't forget your stealth." Several green acknowledgement lights winked on, and I motioned to move up.

Once we got closer, I saw how much damage the new guns really did. It was three different kinds of messy down there. The clean up crew simply covered the bodies in snow to hide their presence. Once they were complete, they were waved into the still open elevator.

Christine punched a button on the holographic control panel to lower the elevator.

Now I know how the ODSTs feel, I thought to myself, _feet first into hell._

The door opened, and a bright purple light showered the inside of the seemingly empty elevator.

"Remember, stealth until confrontation is an absolute must." I whispered over the comm.

"Well, that's all fine and dandy, but what are our assignments, Captain?" asked a voice.

"Ryan, I want your team to access the Communication Array and fabricate a message explaining a catastrophic meltdown of an experimental weapon in this lab. Frito will assist Zealous to take the firing range. We'll be the distraction for Ryan." Green acknowledgement lights flicked on in my helmet.

The near silent footprints were leading away from us, and our two teams were left alone in the hallway.

We began to move towards the Firing Range. "Lucky for us, the firing range is relatively close by." Christine remarked. "We're only three doors away from it."

I didn't really register Christine's comments; I was far too busy inspecting the situation around us. So far, we hadn't experienced any personnel in the hallways, nor have we seen any evidence of them recently passing by. _Is it a trap?_ I asked myself. _No, we would have seen signs of it. But where are all the aliens, then?_

"We're here." Christine said over the speaker. A large, semi-circle door sat in front of us. There were a couple of semi-transparent purple windows in it, and through them we could see faint shimmers of light.

Christine reached her hand out, and the door slid open. A plasma bolt whizzed by the doorway. "Damn!" Mike yelled as he pulled Christine out of the way, just as it would have struck her hand. Then a bright red spike flew past. In a matter of seconds, hundreds of projectiles began flying mere feet away from the doorway.

"Have they seen us? Have they seen us?"

"I knew it was a trap!"

"That scared the crap out of me!"

"Quiet!" I yelled. I observed the trajectory of the plasma bolts and superheated spikes. They were angled continuously at a parallel angle to the door. "They aren't trying to kill us." I said. I snaked a fiber-optic cable around the side of the doorway. The video feed from the cable showed dozens of Covenant Brutes, Grunts, and Drones firing weapons at something downrange.

I turned the cable the other way and saw the silhouettes of humans and Elites printed on metal sheets. In each shadow, there were several superheated spikes and plasma scorings.

"They're testing out their weapons." I snaked the cable back the other way and saw several of the covenant soldiers setting their weapons down and conversing with each other. "Now's our chance, move, move, move!" I waved the mob of invisible teenagers into the room. On

the floor, there were several waist-high barriers that, presumably, provided an area where targets could emerge from the floor. There were dozens of them scattered all across the floor. It was only when I sat myself behind one of the barriers did I realize how large the room was. It had a ceiling at least fifty feet high, and there was enough room for at least sixty soldiers to line up shoulder to shoulder and fire down range. There was actually about seventy-five feet between the front and back of the room; we had entered through a side door.

"All right, guys, here's where we put up a fight." Each of the Spartan-IIIs was hidden behind their own barrier. I turned towards the one Eric was hidden behind. "How many do you count?"

He hesitated for a second. "At least forty, if not a few more. Looks like several Drones, ten Brutes, and a handful of Grunts" He paused. "It looks like a few of them have weapons thatâ€¦ weapons I haven't seen before."

This made me worried. Weapons we hadn't seen yet? Who knew the damage and suffering they could causeâ€¦

"What's the plan?" asked Matt.

I poked my head out above the barrier I was behind. "Okay, Matt, and anyone else with a shotgun, I want you to get as close to them as is comfortable for you. Anyone with an MA5K, stay here in the middle of the room, and Snipers move back and provide cover."

Several green lights winked on, and the motion tracker showed my fellow Spartan-IIIs spreading out. "As soon as your in position, light 'em up." I reminded them.

A few seconds later, the crack of a Sniper Rifle sounded, and downrange a Brute's head exploded.

The crackle of MA5Ks began, and I hoisted my gun above my barrier. I looked over and sighted a Drone. The flying bug had a look of what another of its kind might register as surprise on its face, and I depressed the trigger of my gun. The kick of the rifle had barely changed, I noticed, but the results were much deadlier. Several fist-sized holes appeared in it's chest, and pale green blood oozed out of each new opening.

I immediately sighted a Grunt and pulled the trigger twice. One bullet entered it's chest, another it's sternum. There were two new holes in the small thing, and it grasped at it's throat with both hands.

Only after their ranks had been thinned considerably did the Brutes downfield begin to return fire. Red hot spikes streaked over head; impacted in nearby barriers or walls. Green plasma bolts flew threw the air and slowly melted the barrier's unknown alloy.

I aimed back down the range and sighted a Brute. Each shot that hit its armor left a dent, until it suffered so much damage that it cracked, burst, and offered no more protection. An instant later, the ape's stomach was full of super-dense lead. My clip was dry, so I thumbed the release button and let the clip fall to the floor. I slammed another one into the receiver and cocked the gun.

As I aimed back down field, I stopped myself from shooting. I saw one grunt wheel out a tray of small blue orbs and long black rods. Each soldier picked at least one item up from the passing cart.

"Shit! Grenades! Take Cover!" yelled Sarah. She fired her MA5K from her hip, mowing down another Brute, before rolling to cover behind a barrier.

Each creature down range flung their explosive device in our direction. The whistling black tubes were followed by the glowing blue spheres, and each one landed and exploded with extreme force.

With each explosion, I anticipated someone yelling "Man Down!" or "Medic!", but the comms remained silent.

Wow, these guys have horrible aim, I thought. I almost allowed myself to laugh, when a Spike grenade landed right next to me. I sat in disbelief for a second before standing up and scrambling over the top of my cover. The grenade exploded right as I rolled over the top of the barrier, and I felt a sharp pain in the heel of my foot.

"Ah, shit!" I yelled as I landed on my back behind another barrier. I grabbed at my leg, and twisted my foot around. Two still-glowing spikes were lodged in my foot, right in the heel.

"They got Flynn!" Sarah yelled.

"What?!?" several people shouted in disbelief.

"I'm fine, dammit; I just got spiked in the foot." I grunted.

There was a pause over the comm. Mike spoke up. "Well, jeez, that's not a wound." He said with what I could tell was a smile in his voice.

"Shut up, faggot." I yelled jokingly at him.

Sarah rushed over to my position. "Where does it hurt, boy?" she asked with sympathy in her voice.

"Right foot." I told her.

She reached down and in one fluid motion, yanked out the spikes from my heel. "All better." She remarked. She made the Spartan Smile gesture over her faceplate.

"Thanks." I said. She nodded, and stood up next to me. She ran over to another barrier near the wall, returning fire all the way.

I shook off the dazed feeling I had and picked my gun back up. "I'm going to check in with each person. Keep firing, Spartans!" I ran to a barrier three rows ahead of me. I found Matt there, blasting shells over his small section of cover in a very methodical manner. He shot, pumped the handgrip, shot, pumped the handgrip, and reloaded when his gun went dry. Even though he wasn't as close as he needed to be to inflict maximum damage, he was still putting a hurting on the aliens ahead of us. I saw one bearing he shot go wild, ricocheting off of a Brute's chest guard and upward into its skull.

"You all right buddy?" I asked him.

"Fine! Just don't get shot any more, you!" he said and kept on firing. I checked in with the other shotgunners, and moved on to those who had an MA5K. Everyone was fine, and before I could move to check in with Eric, he and the other snipers gave me green acknowledgement lights. I moved back to where I was a moment ago, aimed my rifle back down towards the Covenant soldiers, and fired.

"Flynn, I see a few of them uglies down range getting out a new gun." He said. "It looks like a cross between a Beam Rifle and a Rocket Launcher. Be careful."

"Thanks, man, I will." Just then another person ran over to my same barrier. He didn't notice I was there until he went to fire again.

"Flynn?" a voice asked.

It took me a second to recognize his voice. "Derek?"

Before I could say anything else, Mike interrupted me over the comm. "Hey, bud, they're getting ready to shoot the new gun thing! Look out!"

I could see everyone duck, everyone that is, except Sarah. She filled another Brute with lead before putting her gun down. She moved to slowly, though, and she began to duck when a light-blue beam flew directly past her helmet and hit the wall near her.

She looked at the wall, and then back towards the Covenant troops. "Ha!" she yelled. "Bastards couldn't kill me even if they wanted to!" She continued firing, but she failed to notice the electrical surges emanating from the wall where the weapon's shot had hit.

The bolts became more spasmodic, and began to arc electricity. She obviously heard the last, loud pop of static from the spot, and turned around to look at the wall. She exhaled a long, heartfelt expletive, and the spot on the wall where the beam struck blew up. It looked like a small plasma grenade explosion, but it twisted and tossed the metal sheets in the wall outward. One particularly large slab of purple metal shot out from the wall. It flew at an adjacent angle to the wall, and it flew right through Sarah's neck, decapitating her. Her body stood limp for a moment, before it fell to its knees and slouched over.

"Sarah! Sarah, no!" I shouted.

Derek looked at her body, then back at me. "Yeah, it hurts, don't it?" he asked angrily.

I grunted a syllable of misunderstanding, and he kicked me out from the barrier we were behind. "That's for Kaylee." He said as he shuffled away.

I was standing out in the open, the nearest cover five feet away from me no matter which direction I went.

"Flynn! Get down!"

"What are you doing, man?"

I looked around me and only then realized the situation I was in. I looked for something, anything that could provide cover for me. I was too little too late in making a decision, as I felt a familiar pain in my shin. I dropped down to one knee and saw five or six red hot spikes stuck deep in my shin. I reached down to pull them out, but was hit in the gut by a plasma bolt. I doubled over, now on both knees.

"Flynn! I'm coming!" I heard Mike yell over the comm.

I felt nauseous. I began seeing stars in my peripheral vision.
Isâ€¦is this it?

I looked back towards the line of aliens who were firing away at me and my fellow soldiers. I swept my head side to side, trying to see all of my friends for what would be the last time. I looked up just to see a light-green orb flying at me. I wanted to move, but part of me kept myself from doing so. The small green ball grew larger and larger, whiter and whiter, until it was so bright I wanted to shade my eyes. I felt a sudden jolt through my entire skull, and everything went black.

5. Race

TRANSMISSION INTERRUPTEDâ€¦

REPURPOSING DATA STREAMâ€¦

**INTERCEPTING TRANSMISSIONâ€¦POST-BATTLE
STATISTICSâ€¦**

OPERATION: **_RACE**_

â€¦

"_Gamma Team, this is Alpha Leader Bravo-21, Sergeant Rymarr. What is your status, Bravo-13?"_

"Pleasure to hear from you, twenty-one, this is thirteen. Bravo-15 and I are approximately one click from your position. We are moving to recover Case number two. Warning, there are several Brutes in your area. We don't know what kind of armor they have. Looks like they want to meet up with Sierra 117 in forceâ€¦Good luck."

"_Thanks. Rymarr out."_

"Thirteen out."

"Alright, Sarge, what's the plan?" asked Bravo-15.

The Sergeant sighed. "Didn't you read the Debriefing?"

"Yeah, yeah, just you point and I'll follow." Fifteen finished.

Bravo Fifteen, a.k.a. Lance Corporal Alexander Durden, was a late-comer to the War. He had joined the ODST Corps at the age of 18, and was first deployed not too long ago. His prowess on the battlefield allowed him to climb rank quickly, and qualified him for special missions, like Operation: RACE. Durden had blue eyes, almost to the point of being grey. His dirty-blond hair covered his head in thick curls, and his five-o'clock shadow gave him a rugged look, while he somehow maintained a boyish charm. However, his defined looks were invisible beneath the black helmet and golden visor of an ODST.

The Sergeant took point with Durden in tow. Durden held a Motion-Scanner, used to follow the mission's objective. On his back was a M41 SSR MAV/AW Rocket Launcher, and on his side was a Tactical M7S SMG. The Sergeant had a BR55HB SR Battle Rifle with several modifications. Included was red-dot and green-dot targeting, 5x Magnification Scope, and a deadly Six-round burst feature.

"Hold up Sarge, I'm registering movement. Looks like an entire squad of Covies." Said Durden. "About forty meters ahead, they'll be moving across that intersection."

"Where are they headed, Durden?"

"It looks likeâ€|An intercept course withâ€|some area in the jungle."

"Hmmâ€|Why don't we spoil their fun?"

"Ha, sounds like a plan." Durden said as he reattached the Motion-Scanner and unlimbered his M41.

They both rushed straight ahead, making a beeline for the intersection. They moved into a destroyed bunker that had several larger pieces of debris around it. There was a single large chunk blown out of it on its left side, which would could easily provide cover.

"Alright, Durden, you get on the roof, let me know what you see."

The Lance Corporal nodded and jumped onto a large piece of rubble. From there he leapt onto the roof and hit a button on the side of his helmet. "Looks like ten _Bravos_â€|and a Wraith tank. They're all Captains, it looks like. I'm setting up the M41 now." He motioned west and sat up with the Launcher on his shoulder.

"Alright, I'll catch the stragglers with my BR."

"Sounds good. They're closeâ€|you'll see them in just a few seconds."

The sound of heavy feet hitting the ground and the hum of a Wraith tank got nearer and nearer.

"_Alrightâ€|taking the shot._" said Durden. An instant later, a rocket streaked from the roof of the bunker. It hit one of the Brutes, and the ensuing explosion killed six of the Brutes, and wounded two others. One of the unwounded pointed towards the bunker and scrambled towards the now backing-up Wraith. He began to hop into

the turret seat, but was stopped short when another rocket flew into the entry hatch of the Wraith, blowing the Brute apart and disabling the hovering purple tank.

The Sergeant stepped out of cover and aimed his Battle Rifle. He aimed at one Brute getting back up after the explosion, and shot a six-round burst at its chest. The rounds tore open its chest cavity, spilling dark blood all over the pavement.

He turned to another Brute who was lifting his Spiker and emptied another burst into its throat. He turned again and shot an armless Brute in the face, leaving a steaming hole in its right eye socket.

Durden jumped down from the bunker roof, SMG in hand. He shot two Brutes, and jumped up on the tank. He unholstered a Frag Grenade and pried open the latch. He removed the priming pin and tossed in the cockpit. He covered it back up and rolled off the tank.

An instant later, the entire thing exploded in a flash of blue fire and twisted metal. Durden hopped back up and tore the clip off his SMG. He slapped in a fresh one, and shouted "Wraith Clear!"

The Sergeant shot another Brute in the face before himself shouting "Clear!"

They both waited for a few seconds, and then lowered their rifles. Durden walked over near the Sergeant. He detached the Motion Tracker and began typing on the touch-screen in an attempt to regain his composure.

"Pilot, this is Team Two. We have taken down a column of _Bravo_'s, and we are moving to capture Case Two now. Out." The Sarge quickly spoke into his helmet's microphone. He received a green confirmation light in response, and he reloaded his Battle Rifle.

"Well Sarge, it looks like the case is in this structure aheadâ€¦|schematics call it 'The Maze'; it's supposedly a training structure for Marines before the place was overrun by Covies." Durden said casually.

"Hmmmâ€¦| 'The Maze", huh? What would it be doing in thereâ€¦|" the Sarge said, trailing off.

Durden put away his scanner. "It could have been blown in there during the explosion that destroyed the main structure," he motioned to a large half-structure. "Or, possibly, it could be a trap. But I doubt that the _Bravo_'s would go through that much trouble."

"Maybe, but still. We can't call in air support, and Team One can't get 117's coordinates alone. We don't have a choice."

"_You got Banshees moving in on your position, Team Two._" The Pelican Pilot reported in.

Durden shrugged and grabbed the M41 off his back. "Feet first into Hell, eh?" he said with a chuckle.

They were in an alley; walls on either side of them. Durden walked with his back to the right wall; the Sarge with his to his left. Durden held the M41 on his shoulder with one hand, using the other to hold the scanner.

"North, Ten Meters." Durden said. He began to say something else, but the whine of Banshees drowned out the rest of what he said. From what they could see, the Banshees were flying in wedges of three, and coming at intervals of twenty seconds.

The Sarge ran up to the alley's end and leaned out around the corner. He saw two platforms, and a large black case resting near the ramp connecting them. It looked like it would provide concealment from the Banshees on their first pass, but wouldn't hold up after a second pass. He motioned to Durden that after he went, Durden would follow in fifteen seconds. Durden flashed the thumbs up sign, and the Sergeant ran ahead. He slid into the ramp, and grabbed the case.

"Package retrieved! We need transportâ€¦I repeat, Package retrieved!" Sarge shouted over the radio. Once again, a trident of Banshees flew overhead. He watched them break off formation early and circle back around.

"_Roger that Team Two, Mongoose deployed._" The pilot said.

"Durden ran up next to the Sergeant. He threw down the scanner in his hands and gripped the Launcher with both hands. "Did he say 'Mongoose'?" he said in disbelief.

A large shadow darkened the ground around them, and blue plasma fire flew over the ramp they hid under. The object's trajectory was unchanged, even with searing hot plasma flying within inches of it. The object landed, and the pair could see that it was a four-wheeled ATV.

"Yep, he said 'Mongoose'." Sarge replied.

Durden twisted around and looked over the ramp. He dropped back down and looked at the Sarge. "I give those _Foxtrot_s ten seconds before they can get at us." He stated.

The Sergeant scrambled onto the bike and thumbed the "On" button. Durden jumped on back, sitting facing the rear, hefting the launcher onto his shoulder. Sarge gunned it, and they took off, Banshees hot on their tail.

Durden fired a rocket into the sky, with the Sarge staring straight ahead into the clearing where civilization met jungle.

"Hey, Pilot! Any idea where we're going?" Sarge shouted over the radio. "As much as I like driving this thing, I don't want those bastards to stay on our tail forever."

There was a long pause. "_There are two Marine groups in the vicinity, and one is already being visited by Bravo-21 and -22. You'll need to head half-a-click South to meet up with the other group. They're hard to miss._" The Pilot finished.

Another rocket flew from the back of the Mongoose. This time, a definite explosion followed. "Got it, Out."

Durden slapped another pack of rockets into his Launcher. "They're getting closer!" A bright green light flashed off to the left of the Mongoose, and debris showered the two riders.

"Oh, Great! Now they're shooting Bombs at us!" Durden shouted sarcastically.

The Sergeant maneuvered around trees and rubble in attempt to shake their target lock. Durden fired another rocket, and it streaked towards the flying craft. A loud whining sound came from the rear of the Mongoose, followed by a loud crash. The Sergeant took a hard right, and gunned the four-wheeler's engine.

"Heyâ€|Hey! Come on Sucker!" Durden yelled. He tapped Sarge on his shoulder. "Tcch, the _Foxtrot_ is runnin' away." The two of them rode towards the marker undisturbed.

The two ODSTs rode into a courtyard scattered with debris. They hopped off the ATV rifles ready. The courtyard was eerily quiet; only the sound of the two Marine's footsteps could be heard. The serenity lasted only seconds, however, as a gentle whining began to echo throughout the courtyard. They both turned around, and saw a dozen banshees and three Phantoms moving towards them at an alarming speed.

From the back of the courtyard, a loud voice sounded. "Rockets! Rockets!"

An instant later, dozens of rockets streaked from mounds of rubble in the courtyard, right towards the oncoming wave of alien craft. They attempted to bob and weave as the rockets streaked nearer and nearer, but many were too slow, and they were punished with flaming death. One of the Phantoms was even disabled, dropping into the jungle followed by a bright blue explosion.

"Shit! Move to cover!" shouted Sarge, and they both ran towards rubble near the back of the courtyard. They saw flashes of dark green armor, and could tell that they were with Marines.

The two ODSTs jumped over a fallen column and landed next to a black Marine.

"Who's in charge here?" the Sergeant asked.

"I am, El-Tee Grove, at your service." he said, quickly saluting. "What can I do for you?" he said as a Marine next to him opened up with a Rocket Launcher.

The Sergeant looked back over the column, eyeing the ever-approaching Phantoms. The Banshees had begun flying in front of the Phantoms, many falling to the Rockets meant for the large purple troop transports. _Crazy Apes_, the Sarge thought, _sacrificing themselves to let the Phantoms land._ He turned back around.

"Bravo-13 and -15." He said, motioning to himself and Durden. "We are

here with the scanner for Sierra 117."

Grove looked at both of the men. "What scanner?"

Durden and the Sarge looked at each other, and could tell that they both were thinking the same thing: _Oh shit._ Durden looked over the rubble.

"It's still on the Mongoose!" Durden shouted.

"Aaahhh, fuck me!" the Sarge said as he rolled over the column. He ran straight for the idling Mongoose, dodging streaks of plasma being fired from the Phantoms, which were now so close now that he could practically see his reflection in the purple alloy that comprised the hull.

He jumped over a plasma bolt and slid into the Mongoose. The Phantoms were now directly over the Courtyard. The Sarge grabbed the case right as a 400-pound Brute landed on the Mongoose, crushing it with both feet. He roared at the ODSST and proceeded to lift his Spiker, but Sarge fired a burst from the Battle Rifle on his hip, striking the beast in its unprotected neck. Both its hands shot up, grasping at its throat.

The Sarge hopped back up and scrambled back for the nearest cover, which was in the form of a large concrete block. A single Marine hid behind it, clutching two frag grenades. He looked out around the corner as the Sarge grew nearer, and tossed one grenade over his head. After he passed by, the Marine threw a second grenade, both of them landing beneath the Phantom's Grav-Lift. Three Brutes dropped down, but the look of blood thirst on their faces quickly disappeared, and after a loud bang, they all were turned into meaty chunks. The Sarge patted the Marine as he ran past him, and sprinted back to Grove and Durden. He looked back for a brief second to see what looked like a glowing-orange rod stick to the grenade-toting Marine, and then detonate, turning the concrete block he was hiding behind dark-red.

The Sarge made it back in a little less than 10 seconds. Grove was firing downrange at the oncoming Brutes. Sarge threw the case down at Durden's feet. He sat down and reloaded his Battle Rifle, as a voice came over his helmet's speaker.

"_Sierra 117 Search and Rescue Team awaiting coordinates._"

Durden grabbed the case and opened it, removing a sleek black shoulder-mounted laser. He began to look around for any sign of an object breaking through the atmosphere. "I don't see anything!"

Grove sat back down and reloaded his MA5C. "We've lost half my team! We have to fall back into the base!" he shouted.

The Sarge shot a look at him, even though he knew Grove couldn't see it. "We have to hold this position until the Chief breaks through!" he shouted.

Grove frowned, and then turned back to fire upon the Brutes.

The Sarge turned back to Durden. Yet again, a voice crackled over

their helmet's speakers. "_You need to get that laser on the Chief._" The Sarge nodded at Durden, who returned the nod. "You stay here. I'll try to pin them down." He grabbed a dead Marine's Sniper Rifle and ran back to where the Grenade-toting Marine had been killed.

He noticed that the Phantoms were leaving, which meant that all the Brutes had made ground fall. He raised the Sniper Rifle and inhaled.

The only thing he could hear was his heart beating loudly in his throat. It seemed as if everything else was silent. He saw the crown suit of Brute armor moving along a stretch of cover, and he tensed up on the trigger. As soon as he saw the ugly beast's head, he squeezed the trigger, and an Armor-Piercing bullet meant for penetrating steel used in tanks penetrated soft flesh and sent the Brute tumbling down onto the ground.

The helmet of a second Brute moved along cover more slowly, and stopped before the Sergeant could see its head. It slowly stuck out a hand, and the Sarge promptly squeezed the trigger, blowing the creature's entire forearm off. The beast roared in pain and fell forwards onto its knees, out into the open, and the Sarge blew its head off.

He heard the crunch of gravel, and turned to his left. Standing there was a Brute chieftain, wielding a Gravity Hammer. It roared as it brought up its giant hammer and swung the butt end towards the Sarge.

It hit him square in the chest, most assuredly breaking a few ribs. The Sarge shrunk to the ground in pain, and the Brute Chieftain brought its hammer up again. Still gripping his chest, the Sarge brought up the Sniper Rifle and shot a single round, hoping to hit the beast before it killed him. The round connected, penetrating the beast's chest armor and sending shrapnel into its chest. The Brute reeled back and dropped its hammer, clutching at its chest. The Sarge saw this as a time to run, and he did, leaving the spent Rifle behind.

He ran back to Durden, panting heavily. He coughed, and blood splattered on the inside of his helmet. He tripped over once he got to cover, and crawled behind it.

Durden stopped hosing down Brutes with his SMG and turned to his partner.

"Oh shi - Sarge!" he scrambled over. "Are you okay? MEDIC! C'mon, stay with me, what happened? WE NEED A MEDIC OVER HERE!"

The Sarge laughed grimly. "Bastard tried to smash me with his hammer. I stopped him though. He's gonna be pissedâ€¦" he trailed off.

The medic finally showed up; a young girl. She removed his helmet and took a scanner off her belt and waved it over his chest. She turned to Durden. "He's got three cracked ribs and a punctured lung. Sergeant, can you hear me?" she asked loudly.

He didn't respond.

"SERGEANT HARNE, can you hear me?" she repeated louder.

He brushed her away with a limp hand. "Please, sweetheart, call me Sarge." He said.

He picked his helmet back up and put it back on. "One of those _Bravo_s gave me a love tap, that's all." He chuckled and grabbed his Battle Rifle.

She grunted. "Sergeant Harne, you have a punctured Lung, you need to fall back." She said.

He pushed himself up with his spare hand. "I'll fall back when I'm dead. If we survive this, I'll ask you on a date. How 'bout that, sugar?" he said. Durden punched him in the arm, relieved to see his partner okay.

The medic let out a sigh and moved away, off to help another dying human. The two ODSs aimed back down range, as if nothing happened. They were in great firing position, with the Brutes deprived of cover and the Marine with plenty. Unfortunately, in the time it took Sarge's incident to take place, many more of the Marines had died, now leaving only five UNSC Soldiers, including the two ODSs. The only others left were Grove, the female medic, and Marine who was bleeding heavily from the head. They were not the only ones suffering losses, as the Brute's forces had diminished so far only a few remained.

Durden hosed down two more Brutes with SMG fire, leaving others sprawling for cover, when he stopped firing. "Look!" he shouted. Harne stopped firing and looked up.

A large fireball was descending from the sky, heading towards the jungle. "It's him." He said quietly. Durden dropped his SMG and picked up the Laser. He aimed it at the falling fireball, and depressed the trigger.

"Targetâ€|Acquired. I repeat Command, Target Acquired!"

There was a pause, followed by the Pelican pilot. "_Excellent work team two. Awaiting coordinates from Team One. Fall Back, Fall Back_."

Durden dropped the laser and rebrandished his SMG, waving the others into the base door. They all ran inside, first the Medic, carrying the wounded Marine, followed by Grove, who killed another Brute with his MA5C before running inside. The only two out there were Durden and Harne, both of whom were covering the exit. The two remaining Brutes rushed the two ODSs, roaring with fury.

Durden fired his SMG at one, downing it before it reached the column that provided him cover a second ago. Harne went to fire at the second, when blood red flashed in his peripheral vision and the Battle Rifle was knocked from his hands. It was the Chieftain from earlier, and he was blind with rage. He tackled Harne, nearly breaking him in half, knocking him down. Durden unholstered his M6G Magnum and shot the other charging Brute once in the face. Its momentum carried it forward a few steps more before it fell forwards, doing a somersault before coming to rest.

He turned and aimed at the Sarge, attempting to put down the Brute

Chieftain without wounding his friend. "Hold Still!" he shouted.

The Sarge was beneath the 400-pound Brute, who was doing his best to throttle the ODST. Harne held his arm up; he was trying to push the beast's head up so Durden could get a shot. Instead, the Beast Bit Harne's arm, sinking its teeth deep into his forearm.

Harne screamed in pain, and let his grip on the Brute's wrists go. With his right hand, the one not being bitten, he reached for a case on his right thigh. He unclipped a slender case, and pulled out a jet black, 9-inch long combat knife. He quickly brought it up next to the beast's neck, and in one deft motion, brought it to his left, effectively cleaving the beast's head from his neck. The body fell limp on the ODST, but the head was still frozen in a death grip on his arm.

Durden dropped his Pistol and pulled Harne out from beneath the dead Brute's body. He hoisted his friend up, and looked into the sky. He glanced at the giant fireball streaking through the sky, which contained the last hope for Humanity, then looked out over the courtyard, and the Phantoms approaching it. Durden began to go inside, but he was stopped by the Sergeant.

"Wait." He grabbed Durden's arm. "We need to see if the Rymarr confirms his coordinates." He said. They both waited for what seemed like a minutes, and Grove poked his head out of the doorway.

"What are you doing? Get in!" he shouted.

Harne held a finger up to his visor where his mouth was. Harne knew that if Team One failed to get the coordinates, they would have to go to another point and get triangulation coordinates. They waited a few seconds more, before:

"_That's it; we got him! Recovery team has his coordinates, touching down soon, all teams: Fall Back, Fall Back_."

Durden placed a hand on his partner's shoulder, and helped him to get inside the base entrance's doors. Harne took one look back, thinking about how he had nearly died twice that day. He also thought of his son, where ever he was.

The heavy doors behind him slammed shut, enveloping him in darkness.

End
file.